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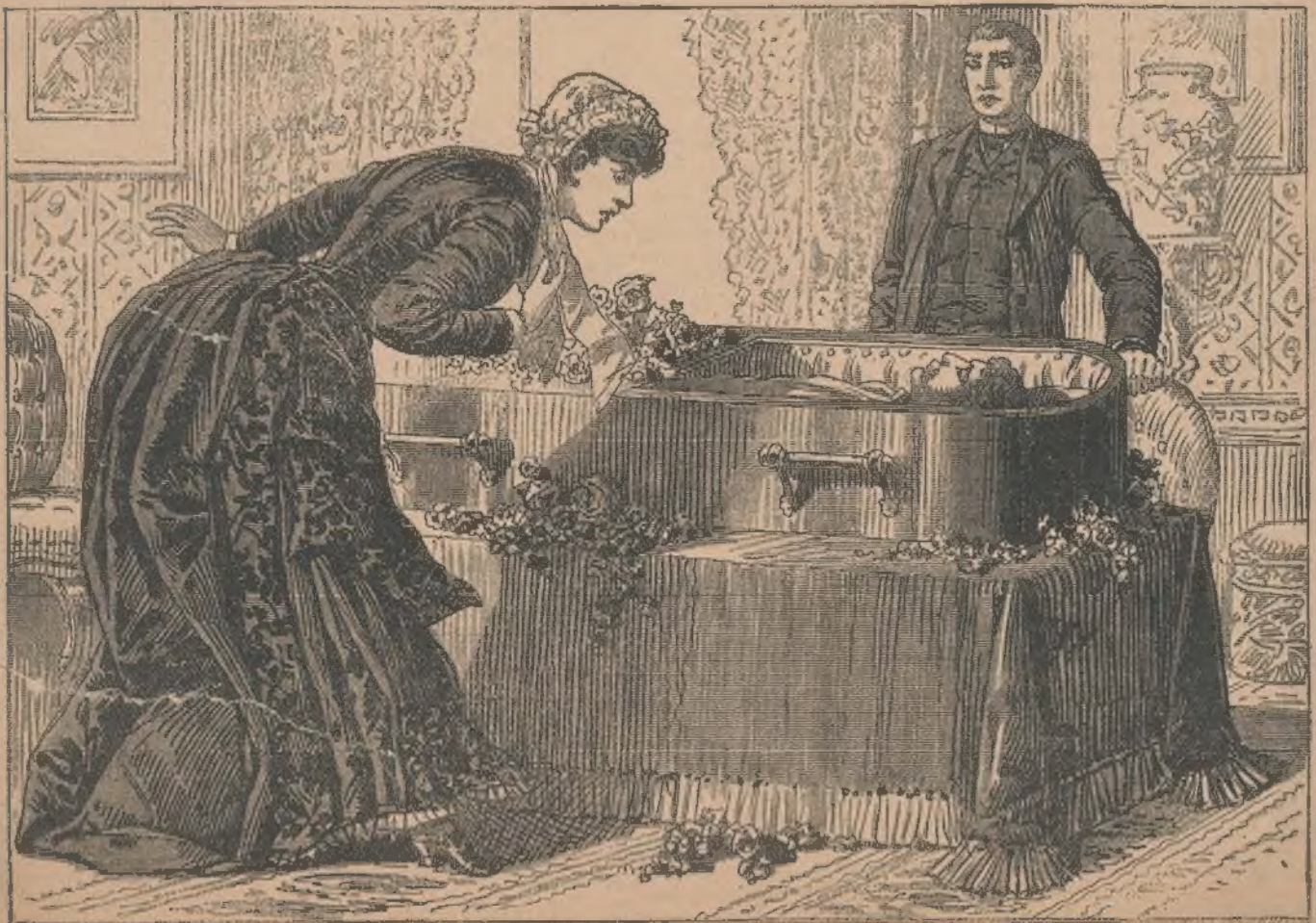
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No. 31.

THE HUMAN VAMPIRE; Or, THE ELIXIR OF LIFE.

By K. F. HILL.



"I SAW HIS LIPS QUIVER. HEAVENS! I BELIEVE HE LIVES!"

The Human Vampire;

OR, THE ELIXIR OF LIFE.

By K. F. HILL,
Author of "THE MYSTERY OF A MADSTONE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE BURIAL.

The last solemn words of the funeral rites had been spoken. The friends of the departed had passed around the coffin to take a silent farewell of Clifford Derwent, and then, one by one, had departed from the grand mansion which had been his home.

When all was over, the house emptied of its sad-faced guests, the widow came softly into the solemn presence of the dead.

He lay in his icy slumber, surrounded by costly flowers, whose heavy perfume filled the spacious apartment. A singularly handsome man, in the prime of life, even death had touched him with kindly fingers, and nothing of the waxen pallor and frozen ghastliness usually seen on the face of the dead disfigured the calm repose of the clearly cut features of Clifford Derwent.

"How life-like!"

This had been the comment of every mourner who attended the funeral service. By his own wish the ceremony had been performed over his open coffin on the day of his death. His directions had been remarkably strange, yet clear and explicit:

"Place me in a coffin covered with pale-violet velvet and lined with white quilted satin. I do not wish any ice put near my remains, but request that no delay be made from the moment of my death till my body is placed in the receiving vault. My coffin may be closed but not screwed down until ten days have expired. I do not wish my beloved wife to gaze upon my features after my decease, as I wish her to always retain a remembrance of my face during my life-time, and not a painful memory of the dead. My faithful valet, Gregory Hamlin, shall carry out all my instructions and take full charge of my remains from the moment of death."

All Clifford Derwent's last wishes had been obeyed, with the sole exception of that relating to his wife.

"I must press one kiss on those dear lips," she sobbed; "and they all tell me he looks like a beautiful statue."

So she waited in another room till the services were over, then stole softly in and took her place by the velvet-covered coffin.

Had the dead man designed that his "death should become him better than his life," he could not have been more successful than he was. In life he had been a golden blonde, and the violet frame-work which surrounded him set off the pale purity of his complexion, the golden gleam of the curls above the ivory brow, the glossy sweep of the full mustache, to perfection.

Never in his life had Clifford Derwent looked so thoroughly the ideal of manly beauty as he did now lying in his amethyst-tinted casket, surrounded by the costly orchid bloom.

"Oh!" sobbed the young and lovely widow, "my darling, how can I live my long dreary life without you?"

A stealthy step on the rich carpet disturbed her.

She glanced up, raising her face from her hands as she knelt beside the coffin and saw Gregory Hamlin standing beside her.

"Madam," he said, respectfully, yet with a certain tone of expostulation, "you know this is contrary to my dear master's wishes."

"I cannot help it, Gregory," she sobbed; "and, indeed, why should I not see him? What painful recollections can I form from that face?"

She pointed to the dead man, and started to her feet as she did so.

"Gregory!" she cried, "I saw his lips quiver. Heavens! I believe he lives!"

"Madam, madam, control yourself, I beg!" said the valet, in a tone of something like annoyance. "Ah, thank goodness, this will soon be over; that is the hearse."

He left the room hastily, and returned accompanied by a gentleman who bore a strong likeness to the agitated lady.

"Come, Louise," he said, with tender firmness, "you must not interfere with Gregory while he carries out your husband's wishes. Come, dearest sister!"

Sobbing convulsively, she pressed a last long kiss on the marble bow of the dead, and then passively allowed her brother to lead her from the room.

Five minutes later the hearse was driven rapidly away. No funeral procession followed it, one carriage, containing the valet

alone, being in attendance. This was also in accordance with the wishes of the dead.

Clifford Derwent had arrived in New York five years before the date of his death. An Englishman of good family, he had easily obtained an entrance to the best society in the city. He was a man of varied attainments, great personal beauty, and powerful magnetic influence. He appeared wealthy, and very soon after his introduction to the highest circles, his engagement to a wealthy heiress and leading belle was announced. His marriage speedily followed, though rumor said the lady's family had sought to delay the ceremony on account of the youthfulness of the bride.

A life of pleasure and luxury had been brought to a close by Derwent's sudden death. Just before this sad event whispers had gone the rounds of the clubs that Derwent had dissipated the greater portion of his wife's fortune. He was known to be a man who betted freely on the race-course, a rumor said he also spent large sums in more questionable ways. He maintained several handsome establishments besides the legitimate mansion on Fifth avenue, a cottage at the sea-side, and a bijou home at Tuxedo Park. He was a distinguished leader of the coaching club, his drag being the handsomest, his horses the finest seen at every parade of the club. Money flowed like water from his hands, and no one knew for certain what the amount of his own personal fortune had been.

Miss Louise Van Stretten had inherited five million dollars from her father, and her husband had full control of this amount. Very soon after his marriage he had quarreled with her only brother, Sidney Van Stretten, and that gentleman had refused to interfere with his sister's husband in any way from that day till his death. When a member of his club remonstrated Sidney shrugged his shoulders.

"I shall not commit the unpardonable folly of interfering between a man and his wife," he said. "You think Derwent will spend my sister's money. So do I. He insulted me on purpose that he might be free to do so, but I cannot prevent him. He must go his road, and I shall go mine. He has a legal right to do as he pleases. Louise was of age when she married him. I knew very little about the man, but it was useless to say so, she loved him—she still loves him, and they must go their own road."

Sidney Van Stretten was somewhat of a student and recluse. His pathway in life certainly did not tend in the same direction as that of Clifford Derwent. So the brothers-in-law did not meet. No one else had a right to stretch out a hand to check Derwent, and his wife seemed happy and content.

Now the butterfly existence had come to a close. Derwent was dead, after a very brief illness, and once more Sidney called upon his sister. She welcomed him, and clung to him in her grief and desolation.

A very few days revealed the state of affairs in the Derwent establishment.

Mrs. Derwent's fortune was utterly exhausted, and her husband had died a pauper. More than that, he was head over ears in debt when his fatal illness brought his brief life of pleasure to an abrupt close.

CHAPTER II.

MYSTERIOUS DOINGS AT THE VAULT.

An hour after midnight on the night of the funeral of Clifford Derwent, a cab drove rapidly through the streets of New York, and at length drew up at the gates of Trinity Cemetery. The night was overcast and murky, and the wind moaned as it moved over the face of the North River toward the dark and lonely resting-place of the dead.

In the vault of the Van Stretten lay the coffin of Clifford Derwent. It was surrounded by those of his wife's family, but had been placed nearer to the entrance of the vault than any of the other caskets.

As the cab drew up at the gate the driver alighted. He was wrapped from head to foot in a cloak, which did not conceal the fact that he carried a large sack, which seemed exceedingly weighty.

Gregory Hamlin, for he was the midnight visitor at the cemetery, opened a small gate at the side of the larger entrance with a key he drew from his pocket, and entered the cemetery. He was absent half an hour, during which time the cab waited beside the gate. The horse seemed a quiet animal, and accustomed to stand, but his patience was beginning to give out, and he had once or twice tugged at the line attached to the weight which rested on the sidewalk, when the gate once more opened and two men appeared.

One walked feebly and leaned somewhat heavily on the arm of the other.

Gregory threw open the door of the cab, and his companion took his place in it. He then slammed the door, and lifting the weight sprang on the box, and drove rapidly away.

"Louise," said Sidney Van Stretten, the morning after the funeral. "I am going to take you away with me for a long trip. When shall we go?"

His sister colored, and hesitated.

"Do you not think a change would do you good?" inquired her brother, looking surprised.

"Perhaps so," she said hastily, "wait until I have my mourning made and other matters arranged. What shall we do about this house?"

"We must dispose of it," said her brother, gravely. "I do not know how much money remains of your fortune, but I fear the amount is so small that it will be absolutely necessary for us to curtail expenses. I presume you are willing to live with us again, as you did before your marriage?"

Mrs. Derwent looked up from her breakfast with an angry light in her large brown eyes.

"I regret that our conversation should be on the subject of money," Sidney went on, kindly. "I wish to spare you all annoyance, but you must let me arrange matters for you if you do not wish to learn much that may prove painful."

"What do you mean?" inquired Mrs. Derwent, angrily.

"Nothing but kindness, Louise. You must know that your living expenses have been very high. Your husband was a man who was not business-like in his habits. No doubt he has been robbed and swindled unmercifully."

"What does all this mean?" asked Mrs. Derwent, rising from the table with flashing eyes and a red glow on her smooth cheek.

"Simply that in future you must allow me to be your banker, Louise," replied her brother, gently.

"Then all my fortune is gone?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am surprised. My poor husband has been robbed. Poor dear, perhaps the thought that he was a beggar helped to kill him."

"Had he no fortune of his own?"

"No, I believe not—very little if any."

"You know we made very few inquiries about his past life and circumstances."

"There was no occasion," Louise said, hotly. "I know, Sidney, you did not love my husband; but remember that I shall not listen to one whisper against him. If we are to live together you must respect his memory, and be perfectly silent on the subject of my fortune."

She swept from the room, leaving her brother biting his lip to keep back an indignant reply to her unjust speech.

As Mr. Van Stretten turned to leave the breakfast-room, the door opened softly and a lady walked in.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Milson," said Sidney, who recognized in the new-comer a widow lady who had been engaged as a companion by Mrs. Derwent.

"Good-morning, Mr. Van Stretten. My dear Louise is so grieved and agitated that I thought I had better see you before you went out to warn you that all exciting topics must be for the present strictly prohibited."

"I have no wish to grieve my sister, as you must be aware," said Sidney, coldly. He did not like Mrs. Milson.

"But you are not aware of an event which may shortly be expected," said the widow, casting down her eyes.

"What do you refer to, madam?"

"The birth of an heir to the late Mr. Derwent."

Something like a repressed smile crossed Mr. Van Stretten's grave face.

"Such a consolation for my dear Louise," cried the widow, rapturously.

"I am glad that my sister should have anything that may comfort her. Good-morning, Mrs. Milson."

Sidney walked out of the house without requesting an interview with Mrs. Derwent.

"He is an iceberg for coldness," said Mrs. Milson, addressing Gregory, Hamlin, who stood in the hall.

"Yes, Mr. Van Stretten is a very dignified gentleman," replied the valet.

"So unlike dear Mr. Derwent."

"Very, ma'am. Do you think Mrs. Derwent feels well enough to give me a few moments' conversation?"

"I shall ask. I suppose you are thinking of leaving us, Gregory?"

"Yes, Mrs. Milson, I have found another position."

"But did not your late master wish you to attend to some other details in regard to his burial. A very sad and singular affair."

"Yes, ma'am. I shall be able to do so without interfering with the duties of my new position. I have only to visit the vault every night according to Mr. Derwent's directions. My poor master had a horror of being buried alive you know. Of course it is all unnecessary, but he was a good master and I shall carry out his orders just as though he were alive."

"I am sure you will. You are faithful."

Gregory Hamlin had an interview with his mistress, and the result was that he packed his effects and left the house.

"Here is a trifle to show that I fully appreciate your services," said Mrs. Derwent, and she handed him a well-filled pocket-book.

"I thank you, madam. You may rely upon me. I shall visit the vault every night, and when the ten days have elapsed I shall seal the coffin according to master's instructions."

"Thank you, Gregory," said his mistress, gratefully.

Strange to say the faithful valet did not visit the vault that night. Had Mrs. Derwent felt any doubts on the subject and sent to investigate, she would have ascertained the fact that the coffin was already sealed.

CHAPTER III.

THE YOUNG WIDOW.

"Grace, he is just your style."

"Nonsense, Lillian. You are always going into ecstasies over somebody. In the first place, he is an Englishman, and I have no love for the English."

"Pooh, you little quaker! I tell you Mr. Vivian is simply the handsomest man I ever saw. He is a perfect blonde, his hair is like gold, and his large sleepy-looking eyes have a curious gleam in them which is immensely fascinating."

"Well, of all the nonsense I ever heard, this farrago is the greatest. Anyhow what chance have I against a widow with the dear only knows how many millions, and the finest diamonds at the Branch?"

Lillian Armstead laughed gayly. She was that most independent of all living creatures—a wealthy widow of twenty-four summers. She was beautiful, dashing, and by no means overwhelmed by grief for an elderly husband who had been dead some eight months.

Both ladies were seated on the beach, watching the bathers. Mrs. Armstead held a huge sun-shade over her head, but her companion defied wind and sun to tan a clear, pale skin, which was one of the chief attractions of quiet little Grace Hunter, who was a Philadelphia girl.

"Grace, you know you are very 'fetching,' with your drab locks and mousey ways," Mrs. Armstead said, after studying the face of her friend for a time in silence.

"And you, airy, fairy Lillian."

"Well, I am proud of my looks. I do not deny that I consider myself a fine sample of the old Southern woman. By old I do not mean to imply age on my own part. I mean the old-time Southern blood, which is fast dying out. The Southern girls, nowadays, are brought up in a different way; they are no longer the petted darlings of a household of rich, lazy people, as they used to be in slavery days. Now they are brought up more as you Northern girls are. No old mammies to spoil them and make them helpless."

"But you, fair Lillian, are surely helpless enough."

"Granted. My mother's old 'mammie,' Phoebe, spoiled me. Yes, I am good to look at, and that is about all."

She was good to look at, in truth. A richly tinted brunette, with wide black eyes, full of slumbering fire, a skin like peaches and cream, and magnificent blue-black hair. Her form was superb, so gracefully slender, yet rounded and full, and her foot and hand were famous for their exquisite beauty.

Mrs. Armstead was the possessor, as her friend had just reminded her, of the most valuable jewels which had been that season exhibited by any lady at Long Branch. Her wardrobe was simply bewildering in its costly beauty and variety. She said she had thrown off her mourning at the end of six months and gone into society because the seclusion incumbent on people in mourning had begun to prey on her health and spirits. Her friends and admirers had all assured her she had done quite right. Why should such a bright young being mourn for an old man who had passed comfortably away after a year of happiness in the company of his young and beautiful wife, whom he idolized? Colonel Armstead had been as unselfish as he was devoted, and he had left his large fortune to Lillian, untrammelled by any restrictions.

"My wife is the daughter of a Southern gentleman, her father was my life-long friend, and I know she is never going to marry a man unworthy of her. Let her marry again and be happy."

wish her to do so. Why should she not?" said the gallant old Georgian, as he lay on his death-bed.

Lillian's pathway was one of roses, and on every hand admirers sprang up.

She had refused offers from the sons of almost every clime.

"I'll marry when I find a man I can love," she told her most intimate friend, Grace Hunter.

"But you are so hard to please, Lilly."

"Yes, I am. Of course I did not love my husband as a woman loves the man of her own heart's choice. My father told me to marry Colonel Armstead, and I did as I was told, but I was a child, not a woman. I have never loved."

Lillian had related the story of her introduction to the Englishman, Mr. Vivian, and Grace listened with interest.

"Where did he spring from?" asked the "Quakeress," as her friend laughingly termed her.

"From England, I suppose. He is very English. Why, here he comes with Mrs. Fred Vandercliff; he has been calling at her cottage, I suppose."

The couple approached, and Grace watched them with interest. The stranger was all Lillian claimed, as far as personal appearance went. A tall, finely built man of twenty-four or five, with a purely blonde complexion, curly golden hair and drooping mustache, and deep violet eyes. His features were classically perfect, his white chin cleft by a dimple, and his head firmly set on a round throat and brawny shoulders.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Armstead," he said, in a rich, musical voice, with a decided English intonation and accent.

Lillian looked up, and her exquisite complexion glowed, her eyes brightened, even her lips took on a richer bloom.

Grace watched her, and her heart sank.

"She loves him already," she told herself, "and somehow I fear all is not well."

Why did she feel as one feels when watching the graceful movements of a dread serpent?

This man was handsome beyond her expectation, and yet a chill of apprehension passed over her as she sat in the warm sunshine, surrounded by pleasant sights and sounds.

Lillian was all gayety; her eyes glowed, her happy laugh rang across the sands and mixed with the soft whisper of the ocean.

Mr. Vivian had greeted Grace warmly when Mrs. Armstead presented him to her.

"From Philadelphia?" he said, bowing gracefully, "ah, that is a city I must see."

"How long have you been in America?" inquired Mrs. Armstead.

"Just four weeks."

"Is this your first visit?"

"My first. I have traveled extensively, but mostly in the Old World—the East."

Grace took an early opportunity of returning to the hotel. She felt sad and dispirited.

"Lillian loves that man, and she will marry him, and be wretched," she said to herself.

The words were prophetic. In two short weeks the engagement was publicly announced.

"So, Lillian, you have at last met a man you can love?" Grace said, with rather a cold smile.

"Yes, I have," replied Mrs. Armstead, emphatically. "Is he not splendid? A perfect Greek god among men!"

"I hope his principles are rather better than those of the Greek gods," said Grace, dryly.

"You cold-hearted, unfeeling girl!" exclaimed Lillian, indignantly.

"Forgive me, dear. The fact is, I am so fond of you, that I cannot consider any man worthy of you."

"You are a jealous puss, and ought to be ashamed of yourself."

As they stood on the hotel piazza—for it was there the friends met the day Lillian's engagement was made public, Mrs. Fred Vandercliff appeared before them in her tiny pony phaeton.

She sprang out before any of the men had time to assist her, and hastened to Mrs. Armstead's side.

"Let me be among the first to offer best wishes," she said. "You will have the handsomest husband of any lady in our set."

Lillian smiled assent.

"Mr. Vivian is so like that other charming Englishman, the one who married Louise Van Stretten," she resumed. "You know the poor fellow who died so suddenly, and had such a funny funeral."

"A funny funeral!" cried Grace.

"Yes; he was buried in a violet velvet casket, and had his coffin left open. Oh, it made lots of talk! I was at the service. He looked beautiful, like wax-work, and Mr. Vivian is the living image of him, only ten years younger, I should say."

Mrs. Armstead did not seem to relish the comparison. She glanced at her watch, and pleading an engagement, left Mrs. Vandercliff and Grace together.

"What do you think of the match, Miss Hunter?"

"I do not know much of Mr. Vivian."

"Exactly. Neither does any one else; but Lillian Armstead is obstinate. She has plenty of money, and can afford to marry a poor man, and I suppose Mr. Vivian is a fortune-hunter."

Grace said nothing, but her heart fell. She knew this marriage would not prove a happy one.

CHAPTER IV.

MADGE WARREN BEHOLDS A FAMILIAR FACE.

Mrs. Derwent had just returned from rather an extended visit abroad. Her baby, a beautiful boy, was now nearly a year old. Her brother had accompanied her, of course, and they were once more settled down in a fine old mansion on Madison avenue, which had been the home of Louise's girlhood.

Mr. Van Stretten had fitted up a suite of rooms for his sister, her baby, and her own attendants. He wished her to feel perfectly at home, and strove by every means in his power to soften the effects of her loss of fortune.

Above the mantel hung a magnificent oil painting of Clifford Derwent. It was the work of an able artist, and singularly life-like. The room was a *fac simile* of one which Mrs. Derwent had occupied in her own home—the furniture, hangings, and bric-a-brac being the same.

It was the first time Louise Derwent had been alone since her return to America. She sat reflecting over her short married life, and gazing fondly on the portrait which seemed to smile upon her.

"It was thoughtful of Sydney to have this room arranged for me," she said to herself. "I believe these are the same Persian rugs, and purple and gold portieres—even that little statue of Terpsichore looks like the one that stood on the bracket on the right side of my baby piano. I believe it is the same. Poor Sid! how kind and good he is! But all his care cannot make me happy. Ah, my loved one! shall I ever cease to mourn for you?"

As she stood before the painting, the portieres parted, and a woman entered the room. She was a tall, finely formed woman, with large coal-black eyes, and a rich brunette complexion. She wore a simple black dress, and the white cap and apron of a house or child's nurse. As the woman raised her eyes to address her mistress, she started violently.

Mrs. Derwent turned as she heard the quick catching of the breath, which was almost a gasp.

"What is it, Madge?" she said, haughtily.

"Pardon me, madam," the woman murmured, her face deadly pale, and her lips trembling. "May I ask who that portrait represents?"

"That is Mr. Derwent, my late husband. Why do you ask?"

"Because, madam, it is surely the portrait of some one I formerly knew."

"Not very probable. My husband, however, was an English gentleman. You may possibly have seen him. I suppose you lived out in nice families when you were a girl in England."

The woman's eyes flashed, and for a moment a hasty reply seemed near her lips. She kept it back, however.

"I came to tell you, Mrs. Derwent, that Mrs. Milsom thinks the baby is not well. She sent me to ask you to come to the nursery, and decide whether I should take him out to-day or not."

"My baby ill," cried the mother, and she hastened from the room in affright.

The woman in the nurse's dress remained, her eyes fixed on the portrait.

"It is he," she muttered. "It can be he, none other. Vain! Heartless wretch! Can it be possible that he came out to this city and married this woman after spending every penny of my fortune and deserting me?"

She clenched her hands and paced the floor, her brow knit, her teeth firmly closed over her lower lip.

Once again she paused before the handsome face which seemed to wear a mocking smile.

"No, it must be some strange resemblance, for that man is ten years younger than Philip Warren was when I saw him last."

With a lingering glance at the portrait she left the room.

Madge Warren was an Englishwoman, who had answered an advertisement Mrs. Derwent had inserted in the *London Times*, her nurse having decided to return to her home in Boston during the lady's visit to London. Madge furnished excellent references, and Mrs. Derwent supposed she was a widow. Such, however, was not the case. Madge was the only child of a

wealthy gipsy horse-dealer. She had married, when very young, an officer in the British army, Philip Warren. This man had spent her money, and then heartlessly deserted her. Her father had died while Madge was in Paris, with her worthless husband, but the gipsy had heard so much about Warren's dissipation that he left his money to a nephew. When Warren learned that Madge's hopes of a second fortune had fallen to the ground, he deserted her, leaving her alone and penniless in the strange city.

Then it was that Madge found a position with a family who were returning to England. She lived with them five years, and left because the children she attended were grown too old to need a nurse.

After spending some time with her cousin, who had been enriched by her father, she decided once more to look for a situation as a nurse.

Deep in her heart the girl cherished a hope that she might yet meet with the scoundrel who had marred her life, and she found comfort in planning schemes of vengeance.

She began to take a lively interest in the stories of the late husband of her mistress. She made many inquiries, and learned much to his disadvantage.

"If this man had been forty, instead of thirty, I should say it must be my husband, but he is too young."

One day she showed Mrs. Milsom a photograph of her husband, taken in his uniform.

"Why, I did not know that Mr. Derwent ever was in the army?" said the lady, in astonishment.

"Maybe he was not. That is a photograph of my husband, Philip Warren."

"But it is certainly a photograph of Clifford Derwent. I could swear to it."

Madge showed her the back of the picture, which proved that it had been taken in Eastbourne, England, ten years before.

"Well, that is the most remarkable resemblance I ever saw, but this man looks older than Mr. Derwent, now that I examine the picture more closely."

"Yes; if my husband were living he would be nearly forty years of age."

Mrs. Milsom spoke of the picture to Mrs. Derwent, who felt indignant that her nurse's husband should resemble her idol. She was destined to meet with further annoyance.

Soon after her return from abroad Mrs. Fred Vandercliff called upon her. That lady had just returned from Long Branch.

"Have you been very gay this summer?" asked Mrs. Derwent, who was beginning to take an interest in society, and the "exclusive four hundred," once more.

"Middling. It has been a successful summer in one respect."

"Indeed! What was that?"

"Quite a number of the girls are engaged."

"Any one I know?"

"Well, yes. Helen Sherman is going to be married. Only a clergyman, but very high-church and fashionable. Then Nettie Carter is engaged to one of the French Legation, and Maud Livingstone is to be married to Mr. Paget, who will be a lord some day. However, the match which excited most interest is the one between Lillian Armstead, the rich Southern widow, and Mr. Algernon Vivian."

"Why did this create an interest?"

"Because they walked off and got married one morning without any fuss. No party, no bridesmaid, no reception, or anything."

"Why did they do that?"

"Ah! Why? Some people are uncharitable enough to say it was because the bridegroom is a fortune-hunter whose antecedents will not bear investigation. But, of course, I don't know. Lillian Armstead is very headstrong, and she is also her own mistress."

"What kind of a man is her new husband?"

"Very handsome, and, bless my heart! Did I not tell you he is the exact image of your husband?"

Mrs. Derwent looked startled and displeased.

"If he were not some years younger than your late husband I should be willing to swear to his identity."

"He is a gentleman if he resembles my husband," said the widow, with dignity.

"Why, certainly. Even his manner, his voice, are exactly like Mr. Derwent's. It is the most remarkable thing I ever saw."

Mrs. Derwent was seriously displeased. First her nurse had claimed that her husband, presumably some low common person, looked like Clifford Derwent. Now, Mrs. Vandercliff had compared this fortune-hunter to her beloved idol.

As the ladies continued to speak of the matter, Mrs. Vander-

cliff not observing her friend's annoyance, Mrs. Milsom joined them.

"Why," she exclaimed, "that is very odd. Don't you know, Louise, that Warren, your nurse, has a picture of her husband, and he is also the very image of Mr. Derwent."

"Call her and let us see it," cried Mrs. Vandercliff, eagerly. Perhaps she might have felt a slight touch of envy of her two friends who had been blessed with such handsome English husbands; at all events she was not averse to having a new subject of conversation to take with her to five or six afternoon teas that week.

"Do let me see if he looks like Lillian Armstead's husband."

Mrs. Derwent felt inclined to protest, but hesitated so long that "Warren," as they called her, was in the room with the portrait before she had made up her mind how to act.

"Why, I never saw anything like this!" exclaimed Mrs. Vandercliff.

"Does Lillian Armstead's husband look like that photograph?" asked Mrs. Milsom, who had once been "in the swim" herself, but was now reduced to genteel poverty.

"Look like it? Why, it is his very picture."

"Who was your husband, Warren?" inquired Mrs. Derwent, with unusual condescension.

"He was a captain in the — Regiment when I married him," said Madge, calmly.

"Dear me, quite a good position. How did you happen to be so reduced?"

"Because that man spent my fortune and then deserted me," replied the nurse, her gipsy blood showing in the fierce light in her eye.

"What a heartless wretch!" said Mrs. Vandercliff. "I hope the man who so closely resembles him, Lillian's husband, will not follow his example."

Then there fell an awkward silence. Too late Mrs. Vandercliff remembered how Clifford Derwent had squandered his wife's fortune. To be sure, death had drawn a kindly veil over his misdeeds.

Mrs. Derwent grew very pale and her hand trembled slightly, as she returned the portrait to Madge, saying:

"Bring baby in, Warren; Mrs. Vandercliff has never seen him."

The arrival of the child changed the conversation, and Mrs. Vandercliff soon took her departure. She felt elated for she was provided with plenty of subjects of conversation for the rest of the day.

"Such a strange circumstance! quite like a romance!" etc., etc.

Mrs. Derwent was distinctly annoyed. She had been intensely proud of her husband, of his manly beauty, of his agreeable manners and popularity.

"What a disagreeable woman Fred Vandercliff's wife is!" said Mrs. Milsom, as soon as the visitor had taken her departure.

"She is spiteful because she had to marry a man who has nothing to recommend him but his money."

"Yes, he is utterly commonplace, my dear Louise, and see how she toadies to Lady Martinson, just because she married a lord."

"I have no doubt she is intensely envious of Lillian Armstead. Lillian is rich, and if she prefers to marry a man she will be proud of, instead of a mere money-bag, like Fred Vandercliff, she surely has a right to do so."

Mrs. Milsom, knowing just how Mrs. Derwent felt, heartily agreed with her.

Meanwhile, on that very day, Sidney Van Stretten made a strange discovery.

CHAPTER V.

A CONTENTED VALET.

Sidney Van Stretten was a student. He loved books for their own sake, and was never happier anywhere than in a second-hand book-store.

Before selling out Mrs. Derwent's house, he had made a collection of all the books and papers belonging to his late brother-in-law, and after carefully packing them in boxes, had them sent to his home on Madison avenue.

He had not looked at any of these books or papers before his departure for Europe. Clifford Derwent was not a business-like man, and none of them were of any importance or assistance in the closing up of his estate.

"I shall go over the whole business myself," said Sidney to his lawyer. "There may be letters and other memoranda which bear upon private matters. I know Derwent was grossly unfaithful to his wife, but not for worlds would I have my sister's faith in her scoundrel of a husband disturbed. She knows he

ruined her financially, but she does not know how some of her money was spent. For this reason I do not wish his papers to go out of my hands. I have had no time to examine any of them, but from a casual glance I saw enough to convince me that for my sister's sake they had better be kept under lock and key."

The lawyer said nothing, but Sidney knew that he approved of his resolution.

Now, that he was once more settled in his old home, taking up one by one the threads of his old existence, his sister gradually becoming interested in society, and much occupied by her baby, Sidney felt that duty impelled him to examine the records of his brother-in-law's life.

So, on the very day that the ladies had discussed the startling resemblance between Clifford Derwent, Algernon Vivian and Philip Warren, Sidney had locked himself into his study with two large packing cases of books and documents, the property of his late brother-in-law. The tops of the boxes had been removed, and there they lay ready for inspection.

Sidney glanced at the windows, the day was somewhat dark, and he possessed the large near-sighted eyes of the student.

"Never mind," he said to himself. "I can light up if I find the task an interesting one."

That he did so is proved by the fact that he rang the bell at dinner hour, and ordered a tray to be sent up with bread, butter, cold meat, and tea.

"Master is going to make a night of it with them books," said the butler.

He was right. Before day dawned Sidney had formed a vastly different opinion of the late Clifford Derwent.

Instead of the gay and dissolute trifler, he had proved him to be a man of deep erudition, and earnest research on one subject alone.

For years, it appeared, Derwent had made a special study of the old but ever fascinating subject—the *Elixir of Life*.

A diary extending over fifteen years had been left behind. It was not kept in an ordinary way. Sometimes for months there would not be a single entry.

Then they would be set down in rapid succession, not daily, but hourly.

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed Sidney, "who would suppose this was the same man society knew? He has absolutely studied the subjects in books of every tongue; he has traveled East and West. I am simply bewildered by the mass of information and evidence he has accumulated. Well, I never gave him credit for so much brains. I must devote some time to the examination of this diary. Now, I cannot begin to form an opinion on its merits and demerits."

With more system he arranged the papers, which had been hurriedly gathered. As he said, the study of what Derwent had termed the "Science of the Renewal of Life," had extended over a number of years.

"Why has this man taken so much interest in this question, and what has been the result of his investigation?"

This is the question Sidney Van Stretten asked himself.

"There must have been some object to be accomplished, or a man of Derwent's inclinations and habits would never have devoted years to the study of an abstruse science. What was that object?"

Sidney Van Stretten laid away the papers, and locked up his library. He wished to make sure of some hours of uninterrupted leisure before attacking the mass of documents.

"I shall tell Louise that no one must interrupt me for some days during the hours I spend in this room."

He found his sister in her boudoir; she looked pale and agitated.

"What is wrong, Louise?" asked Sidney, kindly.

"Nothing, Sid. That tiresome woman, Mrs. Vandercliff has been here boring me to death with her gossip."

"Why, I thought she was a particular friend of yours."

"Nonsense! I never could bear her. She is the most shallow creature on the face of the earth. She has not one idea beyond dress and diamonds. I think she is simply insufferable."

"You are upset. Shall I order the carriage, and you can take baby out to the park?"

"No, no, I am going to lie down. By the way, Sidney, do you know what became of Gregory Hamlin?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"For no reason, but I thought you might engage him as a servant. He was so faithful, and I should like to think he was about the house again."

"He would not suit me, Louise," said Van Stretten kindly, but firmly.

He knew the valet was a thorough scamp, but, of course, could not tell his sister so.

"You don't care for a faithful servant," said Louise, pettishly.

"I have no occasion to test their fidelity."

"What do you mean?"

"I never require anything but ordinary services from the people I employ."

Louise reddened.

"I suppose you mean to insinuate that Clifford had under-hand work for his servant?" she said, angrily.

"Nonsense! Do not vex yourself by putting things in my mouth that did not come there of their own accord."

"Oh, I know you hated my husband; he never had a more bitter enemy."

Van Stretten found this hard to bear, and not wishing to quarrel with his sister, he turned and left the room.

"I did not tell her to leave me in peace when I was in the library," he said, "but perhaps it is as well; she might have fancied I was plotting against her."

Louise Derwent had never possessed much force of character. She had been indulged and spoiled all her life, and had grown selfish and careless of the feelings of others. She had never felt much affection for any one save her worthless husband, but she had exalted him on a pedestal and made an idol of him.

She had suspicions that all had not been well with Clifford Derwent, but she resolutely thrust them back.

"There is something mysterious about Sidney," she said; "he hated Clifford. I suppose he is angry because he has to provide a home for me. He is just mean enough to grudge the trifle I cost him."

The trifle was about three parts of Van Stretten's entire income, but he certainly did not grudge it.

If Mrs. Derwent had been sincere in her wish to see Gregory Hamlin she had not long to wait for its gratification. Two days after the conversation with her brother, she met the ex-valet face to face as she stepped out of her carriage in front of Macy's.

He did not appear anxious to speak to his former mistress, but was passing by, merely lifting his hat. She beckoned to him, however, and he halted, again touching his hat.

"Oh, Gregory," she said, "I have been so anxious to see you. I thought you were no longer in the city."

"I have just returned, madam. I have been in England with my new master."

"Are you still satisfied with your position?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am. My master is a perfect gentleman. Generous and kind."

"What is he?"

"An English gentleman. He was only married the other day."

"Indeed! Is the lady English, too?"

"No; the lady is a Southerner; she was a widow—Mrs. Armstead."

Mrs. Derwent started violently.

"Then your new master is the man who looks so like Mr. Derwent?" she said, hastily.

For a moment Gregory looked confused and nonplused.

"I have heard of Mrs. Armstead's marriage," Mrs. Derwent resumed, "and I was told that her husband resembled mine so closely that he might readily be mistaken for him."

"I don't think the likeness is so remarkable as that," said Hamlin, after a few moments' consideration. "Mr. Vivian is a younger man than Mr. Derwent."

"Yes, I heard so. I should like to see him. I suppose they are in the city?"

"Yes," said the valet, slowly, as if pondering his reply.

"I know Lillian Armstead, or, I should say, Mrs. Vivian. Where are they? Have they taken a house?"

"No, ma'am; they are at the Windsor. They are going abroad almost immediately."

"Ah, well, I may find time to call. I thought, Gregory, that you might not be satisfied with your new position, and in that case I should ask Mr. Van Stretten to engage you."

"Thank you, Mrs. Derwent; but I do not believe I should ever suit Mr. Van Stretten."

"Strange!" thought Louise; "almost the very words Sidney used himself in speaking of Gregory."

"Well, I am glad you are comfortably situated," she said, aloud, and nodding affably to the ex-valet, she swept into the store.

"That was a close shave!" said Gregory Hamlin. "I told him it would not do to be too much in New York; but I do not suppose there is any danger."

He strolled on meditating deeply.

Mrs. Derwent did call upon Mrs. Vivian, but that lady was not at home.

"I have not seen Lillian Armstead for six years," said she, as she drove home, "and she never met my husband. How very strange that Gregory should be engaged by another master so

like Clifford. "Truth is stranger than fiction." I should like to see this man, though I dare say I should feel it very much."

She did not have an opportunity, for Algernon Vivian and his bride left the city the next week.

CHAPTER VI.

"YOU MUST LEAVE ME TO MY FATE!"

Two years of married life rolled over the head of Lillian Armistead, or, rather, Lillian Vivian, though many of her friends found it hard to grow accustomed to the latter name.

She was once more in her native State, Georgia, and living in the city of Savannah.

Grace Hunter was spending the winter with her old friend, whom she had not met since Lillian's hasty marriage at Long Branch.

Grace observed, on the evening of her arrival, that her friend was greatly changed. The beautiful brunette face no longer wore a smile of contentment, or the happy, joyous expression which had formerly seemed habitual.

"I fear she is not in good health," said Grace to herself, as she lay down upon her pillow. "I shall not say anything, but to-morrow I shall observe her closely."

The next day the two ladies breakfasted together.

"Is Mr. Vivian absent?" asked Grace, for she had seen nothing of him the night before.

"No," replied Lillian, her delicate dark brows meeting in a frown. "He is not an early riser. I want you to see something of the city before visitors commence to call and take up your time, so I am going to drive you out to Bonaventura, our beautiful cemetery. It is an absolute wonder—the long avenues of live oaks, such immense old trees, and the Spanish moss which drapes them, so mournful looking; it is just such a place as I should choose to lie in when I am dead."

"Why, Lilly, how seriously you talk! Where are your gay spirits, which always kept all your friends so happy?"

Grace had not intended to allude to her friend's changed looks, but the words slipped from her before she thought.

"Fled with my youth, I suppose," said Lillian, with a smile and a sigh.

"Your youth is not fled. Why, it is but two years since you were the gayest and happiest belle at the Branch. Have you been there since?"

"No. Now, Grace, run and put on your hat, for I rose early on purpose that we might enjoy a long day together. I suppose by to-morrow a host of callers will arrive and absorb all your time."

Grace obeyed. She saw that Lillian, for some reason, did not wish to talk of the past.

"I fear she is not happy," she said, sadly, for the Southern girl was very dear to the little "Quakeress."

Lillian was waiting for her in the hall when she descended the stairs. She was drawing on her long driving gloves.

"Are you still such a daring driver?" asked Grace.

"Yes, I believe so; but these ponies are quiet."

A little impish-looking black boy sprang up at the back of the phaeton. He was their only attendant.

Out in the strong sunshine Grace saw her friend's face more plainly, and she was simply shocked by the change which had taken place.

Dark violet circles surrounded the eyes, the cheeks had lost their perfect oval and rich bloom, and the full lips had acquired a hard, set expression.

Grace felt her heart sink, even as it had done the day she first set eyes on Algernon Vivian.

She no longer asked herself, "Is she happy?" Full well she knew that Lillian's face was not the face of a happy or contented wife.

That day Mr. Vivian appeared at dinner. He seemed all attention to the ladies, but Grace observed that his wife scarcely spoke to him, and immediately after dinner he excused himself by pleading a prior engagement and left the house.

As the two friends sat chatting over old times, the door-bell rang, and a moment later Lillian introduced Grace to her brother, Mr. Robert Tatnall.

"Where is Vivian, Lilly?" asked Mr. Tatnall. Grace observed that his face wore a grave, indeed, a stern look.

"I cannot tell," replied Mrs. Vivian, carelessly.

"Well, I shall have to interfere before long—Hem! Yes, Miss Hunter, as I was about to say, I have many friends in your city."

Grace felt wounded. She knew Lillian had bestowed a warning glance on her brother, and checked what might have become a confidential conversation.

"She does not wish me to learn the true state of the case,"

she said, "but how can I keep my eyes and ears shut? I can see and feel that her husband neglects and slights her. A proud beauty like Lillian!"

The evening passed quietly, but not happily. Grace realized that the subject of the master of the house must be avoided. Over the party was a feeling of restraint, which was so oppressive that every one felt relieved when ten o'clock struck and Mr. Tatnall bade his sister and her friend good-night.

Lillian made no remark on the subject of her brother's injudicious comments on her husband's conduct. She evidently wished Grace to either remain in the dark, or else ignore the matter. Grace was hurt. Lillian had been a very close and dear friend for years; they had corresponded during the absence of the Vivians, and soon after they were settled in their Southern home Grace had been invited to visit them. Now she felt that she was treated like a stranger.

"Poor Lillian!" she said, sadly. "She is wretched, and too proud to let her friends know it. Well, I shall make my visit a very short one, for it cannot make her any happier to have any one here as a witness of her misery."

The first day was a fair sample of all the others. Vivian neglected his wife openly. He spent all his time away from his house, sometimes not entering the doors for days at a time.

He was known to be a gambler, and from many sources Grace heard whispers that shocked and grieved her.

Why did this proud woman stand such treatment?

Surely she could not retain any love for a man who so grossly insulted her. This was a mystery to poor Grace, who deeply regretted that she had ever come to Savannah.

One night she sat alone in the parlor. She had not felt well enough to attend a reception which had been given in her honor by the oldest friend of Lillian's family in the State. She had, however, insisted on Lillian going.

About ten o'clock, just as Grace was about to go to her own room, the bell rang, and a moment later George Tatnall entered. He was a fine looking man of some forty years.

"I suppose you will think my call a very unceremonious one, Miss Hunter," he said, "but I was at the reception, and seeing my sister come in alone I hastened here in order that I might have a few moments' conversation with you privately. You are a very dear friend of Lillian, and have, I believe, great influence over her."

"I love her dearly," said Grace, in a low tone. She dreaded Mr. Tatnall's communication.

"I am certain of it. Well, Miss Hunter I am in hopes that you may be able to do something to help my poor sister."

"I am not only willing, but most anxious to do so."

"You are, I know. We, her two brothers, have tried our utmost to induce her to leave the villain whom she was so foolish as to marry, before he has spent every cent of her fortune and broken her heart."

"I am afraid that I dare not interfere. Lillian has not confided her trouble to me."

"Confided her trouble! Why, it is known to every one in Savannah. He makes no attempt to hide the facts. He is openly unfaithful to her. He has disgraced us until we are ashamed to show our faces. I would shoot him like a dog if she did not continue to live with him."

"He is not worth shooting!" cried Grace, hurriedly, for the black eyes of the Georgian flashed fire.

"Well, the question is, are we to stand by and see our sister insulted and beggared by a man who sprang up like a mushroom."

"Do you not know his family? Could you not remonstrate with him?"

"I do not speak to him, neither does my brother. We never enter his house when he is in it. As for his family, no one of us knows a soul belonging to him. Lillian has never met one member of his family, though she was abroad nearly two years. She acknowledges that."

"What is it you wish me to do Mr. Tatnall?"

"I wish you to speak seriously to that unhappy girl. Tell her, that in justice to herself, she should leave this man, whose conduct is an open insult to her dignity as a woman. Leave him before he dissipates every penny of her fortune."

Grace felt embarrassed and miserable. She loved Lillian, and she knew that Lillian loved her, but the Southern girl had so much dignity that it was an extremely delicate matter to obtrude advice on such a subject, particularly as Lillian had not shown any inclination to bestow her confidence on her friend.

"I am afraid that such advice offered unsought might only make Lillian angry," she faltered, blushing deeply, and trembling with agitation.

"If you fail me, Miss Hunter, I shall make up my mind that my poor sister must hasten her fate."

"Oh, believe me, I am so willing to do anything. Do you



THE ARRIVAL OF THE CHILD CHANGED THE CONVERSATION.—Chap. iv.

think Lillian could be induced to go to my home on a visit, and then you might force Mr. Vivian to come to terms while she was gone?"

"Try her. She seems determined that no word shall be spoken against this man in her presence. She tries to keep up a pretense that all is well. Call it a visit and she may be induced to go."

"I shall try my utmost. Oh, Mr. Tatnall, believe me, do believe me, that I am willing to do anything in the world for Lillian."

"I do believe you. Now, Miss Hunter, I shall leave you. Ask her to-night—do something soon, for matters grow worse every day. Good-night, and Godspeed."

He left her, and Grace made up her mind to remain up until Lillian should return home and try her utmost to win her confidence before she slept that night.

The hours dragged slowly on, and at length a carriage stopped before the door. Some one alighted using a latch-key.

Grace regretted that she had remained up, for she knew the master of the house, and not the mistress, had arrived.

She withdrew into the back parlor, trusting to escape observation. Algernon Vivian, contrary to his usual habits, walked into the parlor where the lights were burning dimly.

"Well," he said, throwing himself into a chair with an oath, "so the queen has not returned, neither has the long-faced Quakeress, the satellite."

"No, the ladies have not yet returned," said Gregory, who was not aware that Grace had not accompanied her friend.

"Hum! Well I am sick unto death of the whole business. I am going to give the queen the shake, and let her see I am tired of her airs."

Some conversation, interspersed with oaths, followed. Grace sat in the darkened back parlor listening with horror to the foul talk of the man the proud Southern girl had given the honored name of husband.

"What a vile wretch!" she said, "to speak of his wife in such a manner to a servant."

While she sat confused and horror stricken, another carriage stopped before the door, and a moment later Lillian swept into the room. Her maid had admitted her, and then retired upstairs. Lillian wore a dress of white satin with amber stripes, a band of diamond encircled her throat, and another row of large flashing gems her queenly head. Her trained dress lay far behind her upon the carpet, and as she stood before Vivian she looked every inch a queen, as he in his shameful mockery had termed her.

"So, madam, you have come home? May I inquire whether you enjoyed yourself or not?"

Lillian's black eyes flashed upon him such a look of contempt, that Grace from her hiding-place felt certain of one thing. She no longer loved the man who had won her hand and fortune.

"It does not matter to you whether I did or not," she said, with quiet dignity.

"No, I don't care much, that is a solid fact. I waited for you on one account, and no other. I wish you to sign a paper for me before you retire to your rosy slumbers."

"In order that you may squander some more of my money?"

"Exactly. I wish to dispose of some rice fields on the Saltillo River."

"You shall dispose of no more of my property," Lillian said, calmly, and gathering up her light lace wraps she swept out of the room, followed by a curse from the villain to whose care she had intrusted her life's happiness.

Grace hastened after her friend, and reached the door of the room just as Lillian was about to close it.

"Ah, good-evening, Gracie. Why did you sit up for me, little pale cheeks?" She spoke playfully, and seemed as calm and composed as usual.

"I wished to have some talk with you. May I be your maid to-night?"

"Certainly. Fanchon, you may go. Now, I shall be glad to know what this important communication may be."

As Grace drew the jeweled pins from her friend's long silky hair, with fingers which trembled slightly, she said:

"I am going home, Lilly, and I want you to come out and make me a long visit. You used to like Aunt Ruth and Uncle Abner, and they are both fond of you. We can fancy we are schoolgirls once more. Do you remember all the fun we used to have?"

Lillian was silent for a few moments.

"Why do you ask me to leave my home, Grace?" she quietly inquired.

"Leave it on a visit, for the same reason I came here—because I want to have you with me."

"No, you think I am unhappy; and you are right. Oh, Grace! do you not know that death would be far sweeter to me than the life I lead?"

Tears flowed swiftly over Grace's pale cheeks, but Lillian's eyes were dry.

"My dear," sobbed the loving girl, "you need not stay to endure such treatment. Come home with me, and be your own happy self once more."

Lillian's face, reflected in the mirror, was calm and still, as though the conversation was of the most ordinary kind.

"And you will come? Let us go to-morrow."

After a few moments' reflection, Lillian rose, and, taking Grace in her arms, said, calmly:

"Grace, I am sorry to distress you. I was foolish when I brought you to this house. You must leave me to my fate."

"Why, Lillian! What can you mean?"

"Just what I say, dearest Grace. I am sorry I can give you no explanation of my conduct, but so it is. All my friends, I suppose, will desert me in time, for they cannot understand my conduct. I am content."

"But, Lillian, you have given me no answer. Will you come home with me and rest? Then I am sure you will see things in another light. Now you are bewildered by your troubles."

"It is impossible, Grace. I must stay here till the end."

"And you will not confide in me?"

"I cannot. Forgive me, Grace. I know this mysterious talk is not satisfactory. Now, dear, leave me. I am very tired."

Two days later Grace returned to her home, leaving Lillian, as she said, "to her fate."

Mr. Tatnall accompanied Miss Hunter to the train.

"I know you tried your utmost," he said, pressing her hand gratefully.

"I did, indeed I did. I tried again to-day, but she grew angry with me for persisting. It is useless."

Tears were streaming over Grace's cheeks.

"I know, I know," said Mr. Tatnall, hurriedly. "Say no more. I suppose we must, as she says herself, 'leave her to her fate.'"

CHAPTER VII.

STRANGE ENTRIES IN THE DIARY.

Early next day Sidney Van Stretten shut himself up in his library, with the firm intention of examining at least a portion of his brother-in-law's diary.

The first entry was dated fifteen years back, and had been written in Cheltenham, England. It commenced abruptly:

"Have experimented to-day more successfully than ever before. Subject, a pensioner, Jacob Petrie. Await results."

Ten days later this entry appeared:

"Jacob Petrie died last night. Some important ingredient still lacking."

These two entries were repeated at various dates for a period of twelve years. Then a change occurred. The next ran thus:

"After injecting one ounce of the new preparation, found marked improvement. Think this is the true discovery. Shall try it on G."

Then followed, in rapid succession, a number of notes:

"Dec. 11th, 18—, 1 P. M. Used the fresh infusion, adding 1 minimum of gold. Marked results."

"2 P. M. Increase of strength, pulse normal, eyes clear and bright. Success."

Entries followed rapidly—so rapidly that it was evident the experiments had been tried on more than one subject. The entries were repeated with little variation. Now and then the word "success," and "marked success," proved the satisfaction of the writer.

"Well, this is the most remarkable thing I ever knew," said Sidney. "It seems that Derwent has for years been trying to discover the Elixir of Life, and at last made himself believe he had done so. I suppose he did succeed in making some kind of a witches' brew that was innocuous. Some of these experiments have been tried in New York. I should give something to find the people he experimented on. They were human subjects, not animals. Well, whatever devilishness he has been engaged in, that Gregory knows all about it. I wish I could get hold of him. I'll tell Louise I am willing to try him as a valet, though I never liked the fellow, and believe he is as thorough a villain as his master. I wonder if Derwent killed himself with one of his experiments. His death was awfully sudden."

Deeply interested Sidney Van Stretten continued the study of the various documents. Many of them were in languages of which he was ignorant, Persian, Sanskrit, and other of the ancient Hindoo tongues. Nowhere did Sidney find the ingredients of the marvelous elixir mentioned. The journal or diary had only been kept as a record of the results of various trials of the wondrous mixture.

"Well, it is the most extraordinary thing I ever came across," said Van Stretten, as he piled all the mass of documents into the deep drawer of a large book-case and locked them up securely.

"Now I shall try to get hold of Gregory Hamlin. I am certain he can give me more information than all that pile of stuff I have waded through."

He sought his sister and found her just about to step into the carriage for a drive to the park.

"May I accompany you, Louise?" he asked.

"Yes, if you do not object to the baby and the nurse."

"Certainly not. I am fond of babies, and this one is well acquainted with his venerable uncle."

It was true. Sidney paid a visit to the nursery daily.

"Louise," said Sidney, as they rolled through the park and in the quieter portion of its wide drives and conversation became possible, "have you heard anything of Gregory Hamlin?"

"No; I met him once, but he had found a master."

"Another question I wanted to ask you. Did you ever know of any experiments your husband tried on himself with any sort of medicine?"

"Why, no!" cried Mrs. Derwent, her eyes opening very widely in surprise.

"Among his papers, old bills, and such things," said Van Stretten, carelessly, "I found a sort of memoranda of experiments it seemed to me that he had been making. I thought you might know something about it."

"No, I never heard of them. I never saw him take a dose of medicine, and I know he hated drugs and doctors."

When Van Stretten used the word "experiment," the baby's nurse, Mrs. Warren, started violently.

Sidney Van Stretten did not observe it. Neither did his sister. Madge paid strict attention to the conversation, but of course knew her place too well to offer any remark.

For a long time Sidney Van Stretten did not open the drawer where he had deposited the records of Clifford Derwent's experiments with the Elixir of Life. When he looked over them again he had fresh light on the subject.

CHAPTER VIII.

"THANK GOD, SHE IS FREE!"

In the suburbs of the city of Savannah, in a long, low building, there resided a very singular old man.

The old house was almost as remarkable as its owner. Before the war it had been the family mansion of a cotton planter. The plantation had been purchased for a sum much below its value, just after the termination of the war, when property in the South was valued at a mere song during the depression resulting from the deadly struggle between North and South.

The upper portion of the house had fallen into ruins, but the first floor and basement stood firm, and ivy had covered the whole building till it resembled some feudal castle on the banks of the Rhine rather than an American home. The plantation was lying idle, and had not been cultivated for years.

The proprietor of the place was an old Englishman, by name Jabez Lohn. He was well educated, but so eccentric and re-

served that he had found no friends all the long years he had lived in the ruins of "Spotswood," for such was the name of the plantation.

Unlike most recluses of his class, old Jabez was neither miserly nor careless in his dress. He hired three servants when he purchased Spotswood—a man and wife, and a nephew, who was supposed to be half-witted. A small patch of ground at the back of the house was kept in cultivation, and here old Carmel and "African Ed," her husband, raised "garden truck," for their own and their master's use.

Jabez sat on a stone bench near the great ivy-grown posts which marked the place where the entrance gate once stood. A book lay on his knee and the wind played with his long hair and beard, which looked not unlike the mass that draped the tree over his head. It was a lovely morning in the month of September, and Jabez was waiting the return of "Laf," the young colored man who rejoiced in the name of Lafayette, which under existing circumstances seemed to have been bestowed on him in derision.

Laf had gone into the city for the morning papers, and his master was beginning to grow impatient for his return, when a horse stopped on the road near by and its rider hailed the old man:

"Say, can I get a glass of milk? I've ridden farther than I intended and I feel weak."

Jabez did not hail the stranger with kindly welcome. In fact, he looked annoyed, for he hated to have his seclusion disturbed.

"If you alight from your horse and go around to the back of the house, I dare say you can get some milk from the cask."

As he finished this remark Jabez raised his eyes in time to see the stranger alight; indeed, he did so by merely falling in a heap on the grass by the gate-post.

The old man jumped up in alarm and lustily shouted for help, which was soon forthcoming, for Laf at this moment made his appearance on the road, while Carmel and Ed also rushed on the scene in alarm.

The fainting man was carried into the house and placed on a lounge in what was once the front parlor but was now used by old Jabez for sitting-room and sleeping-apartment.

Restoratives were hastily applied, for the swoon seemed death-like, and it was long before Jabez succeeded in restoring consciousness.

At last he slowly opened his eyes and gazed about him wonderingly. Jabez, too, was looking astonished, for never in all his life had the old man seen such a singular combination of youth and age as was presented in the countenance of the stranger.

His head was covered thickly with curls of the brightest gold, and a full mustache of the same hue drooped over his mouth. In striking contrast to this youthful crown, the brow was yellow and wrinkled and the eyes sunken deeply in violet-tinted sockets.

"You are the man I asked for a glass of milk," said he, feebly, and he tried to raise his head, but sank back on the pillow with a groan.

"Yes. You are very weak. Have you been ill?"



"IT IS IMPOSSIBLE. I MUST STAY HERE TILL THE END."—Chap. vi.

"No. Give me some brandy, and I'll tell you where to send for my carriage."

Jabez complied with his request, and the stranger sat up and looked about him with interest.

"You are the old man who lives all alone in a ruin, I see."

"I suppose that describes the state of the case with tolerable accuracy."

Jabez was commencing to wish the guest would make arrangements for returning to his home. Instead of doing so, he was eying his host with an expression of warm interest.

"You are a student, are you not?" he said, suddenly.

"Yes."

A glance around the walls, which were lined with book shelves, might have answered the question.

"Well, I wonder if you are not the man I have been in search of."

"I do not understand you."

The patience of old Jabez was almost at an end.

"See here; how old are you?"

"Sixty-seven, I believe—there or somewhere near."

"Would you like to be restored to the age of forty?"

"He is a lunatic," said Jabez to himself.

"At all events, at my age I have no time to discuss absurdities with strangers."

"This is no absurdity. I can assure you of what I say."

He put out his hand and drew his host close to the couch on which he lay.

"Sit down," he said, "and I will convince you."

Jabez obeyed. He was impressed by something in the stranger's manner, and felt enough interest in him to listen to his story.

It was a long one, and when it was over the stranger breakfasted with Jabez, and they spent the day together.

That night Mrs. Vivian was sitting alone in her little boudoir, when a knock at the door made her look up from her book.

"Come in," she said, and her husband's valet, Gregory Hamlin, entered the room.

"Please, madam," he said, "my master told me to inform you that he would be absent from home for a few days, or perhaps a week."

"Very good," replied Lillian, and she returned to her book.

Gregory hesitated, as if uncertain whether he should say more or not, and, receiving no encouragement, he softly withdrew.

"If she was not so cursed cold and proud," muttered the valet, "but then I suppose it is too late, anyhow. He is near the end of his tether."

That night Gregory arrived at the old ruin, and, in company with his master, took up his abode at Spotswood.

A week later there appeared in the *Savannah Morning News*, among the death notices, the following:

"Suddenly, at No. — South street, the residence of James Elliot, Esq., Algernon Vivian, aged twenty-six years. Interment private."

Algernon Vivian's body was brought to his residence, and lay in an open coffin one day. It was then transferred to the Tattall vault, in the old cemetery on West Broad street.

Lillian Vivian was as silent a widow as she had been an uncomplaining wife. When the estate was closed up it was found that all of her fortune had been expended, with the exception of a few thousand dollars which Mr. George Tattall had privately invested.

"I shall go to Philadelphia with Grace, and, when I am rested, make up my mind what I shall turn to next," said Lillian.

Grace had flown to her friend's side the moment she heard of her husband's death.

"Thank God, she is free!" she said to George Tattall, who met her when she arrived.

"Yes, I am glad that villain's career is over, though he lived long enough to beggar my sister."

Lillian pressed her friend to her heart.

"Faithful friend," she whispered, "so you have forgiven me!"

"I never had anything to forgive," replied Grace, gently.

Lillian closed the book on this page of her life. Her beauty was almost a thing of the past, but already she seemed more cheerful.

"I suppose I shall have to find out some way of earning my bread," she said, as the two friends sped away North. "I am a beggar, you know, Grace, yet, somehow, I feel more light-hearted than I have done for ages."

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGE DISCUSSION OF A VITAL TOPIC.

Two weeks after the "private interment" of Algernon Vivian, Jabez Lohn sat in his room in the old ruin at Spotswood, his

new friend half-buried in a deep, old-fashioned easy-chair, on the other side of a fire which burned in the huge chimney.

The fire was for company more than warmth; the smoldering back-log glowed pleasantly on the wide hearth, and the spluttering pitch-pine in front spent most of its energy in quick flashes of spiteful flame.

Algernon Vivian, for he it was who had fainted before the door of Spotswood, looked very unlike the handsome and brilliant man who had three short years ago won the heart and hand of the beautiful Lillian Armstead.

The formerly glossy golden curls looked dank and dull, the face haggard and sallow. His hand trembled as it held the cigar he was listlessly smoking. In fact, the man was a wreck of his former self.

"Are you perfectly certain you have not forgotten something?" inquired Jabez, anxiously.

Vivian sent a long blue wreath of smoke through his nostrils before he answered:

"Perfectly certain. No, I must study and try. You see I suppose the gradual wear and tear of the tissues goes on in spite of the stimulating and rejuvenating elixir."

"And the dose must increase in strength as years go on?"

The old man seemed more eager than the other.

"Yes, otherwise I cannot understand what is wrong."

"You must not lose heart. You must continue to try."

"Yes. You have felt the benefit?"

"Oh, unquestionably. You can see that."

He stood up, and certainly he had also undergone a species of transformations. His stooped form was now erect, his dim, sunken eyes were bright, his step quick and vigorous. His cheeks had rounded out, and he looked ten years younger.

"Yes, it has done for you what it formerly did for me," said Vivian, pettishly.

"Well, cheer up, persevere; you will get it right at last," the old man cheerfully asserted.

Vivian seemed disposed to give him a hasty answer, but kept it back. He must not lose his patience with the old man. He had proved useful.

The day before the announcement of the death of Algernon Vivian appeared in the paper, a carriage drove up to the door of James Elliot, an acquaintance of Vivian, and from it that gentleman alighted. He was accompanied by his servant, Gregory Hamlin.

Mr. Elliot who was a sporting man and professional gambler, was seated at his breakfast table.

"Good-morning, Vivian," he said, "will you join me?"

"No, thank you."

He sank on to a lounge as if tired out, and his friend regarding him closely, said:

"What's the matter, man? You look under the weather."

"I feel very ill," replied Vivian, and almost immediately sank back insensible.

Gregory, who was in the carriage at the door, was immediately summoned. A doctor was called and Algernon Vivian breathed his last. His body was taken to his home, and the next night conveyed to the vault.

Now, the man whose funeral service had been performed two weeks before was the guest of Jabez Lohn.

Algernon Vivian possessed the power of falling into a trance which so closely resembled death that it deceived the most skilled physicians.

Respiration entirely ceased, the temperature of the body fell, and the action of the heart was suspended. This state continued for hours, and no one could tell that Vivian was alive except Gregory Hamlin, who had been so many years with his master.

After a short silence Vivian said, abruptly:

"You have also made a study of this branch of science. Do you put any faith in the old theory that the heart's blood of a living child has a rejuvenating effect on the aged?"

The old man glanced around uneasily.

"I have often thought there might be a grain of truth in it," he said, guardedly.

"So have I. The difficulty lies in procuring the necessary materials for experimenting."

"I think that might be overcome. There are many poor people who have too many children. Why not give some of them to wealthy people who have none?"

"The rich people might, you think, adopt them?"

"Exactly."

"It would be a risky business and might be a failure."

"Well, nothing can be done without trying."

"If we were in Paris I should not hesitate."

"Pshaw! It is practicable."

Vivian shook his head; old Lohn persisted.

"See, I tell old Carmel that I wish to adopt some poor chil-

dren. Say two, that I shall send them north to my friends to be educated. Well, where is the danger?"

Still Vivian shook his head.

"Well, we shall see. The cause of science goes before everything else in my mind. Such a discovery is of inestimable benefit to mankind. Take the life of some of our learned men—a man who has devoted his life to study, a great astronomer, a learned physician, any man of eminence and usefulness. If such a life can be indefinitely prolonged by the sacrifice of a few ignorant babies, would not such a use of those children be just and right?"

"Probably the learned professor might think so; the parents of the children might hold a different opinion."

"In such a case one would be fully justified in deceiving them. No doubt family ties in some cases are strong. I have known instances, however, where fathers and mothers have not felt any affection for their children, or if they did they took a strange way of showing it. Besides, there are too many people in the world—two many babies are born."

"That is an odd plea to urge in an argument for prolonging human life indefinitely."

Vivian spoke with a cynical smile.

"You are perverse, and willfully misunderstand my purpose. Say some man whose life is worth something to himself, and his country has his life prolonged for a century by the means of two or a dozen useless babies, children of lazy parents, people devoid of intellect, perhaps descended from generations of miserable drunken paupers, perhaps inheriting the seeds of vice, bound to grow up paupers, drunkards, criminals. Make such children the instruments of prolonging a valuable life. Would there be anything wrong in that? Stuff and nonsense!"

"You grow eloquent, but would the blood of such children produce a good effect on the imaginary learned savant?"

"Certainly it would. Physically, these children might be all right."

"Well," said Vivian with a yawn, "the world will take considerable time in being educated up to your theory, and I for one should not like to run the risk of starting out as an apostle of your new religion."

"Oh, no doubt; every fresh discovery meets with opposition."

"We will take another opportunity of discussing this matter, in which I of course am deeply interested. You must not think that I am a man to let a stupid prejudice on the subject of ways and means stand between me and the accomplishment of my purpose. No."

So they parted for the night.

CHAPTER X.

A BLUNT DOCTOR INTRODUCES A PERPLEXING THEME.

The event of the season at Newport was the grand ball given by Mr. and Mrs. Decker, at their new granite villa at Bleak Point. It was a house-warming of the palace of the Chicago millionaire, which had just been completed, and which adorned the rugged cliff overlooking the ocean.

No expense had been spared to render the ball the crowning entertainment of an unusually gay season, and it was an undoubted success.

Part of the evening was spent by the delighted guests in admiring every portion of the villa, which was a marvel of architectural skill and lavish splendor. The floors of inlaid wood and colored marble, the Persian hangings and rugs, the paintings, and bric-a-brac, and the gorgeous flowers, made up a scene of bewildering beauty.

As the carriages drew up, the guests stepped under an awning of crimson and white silk, and passed through a file of men in green and silver livery up to the wide marble steps. The piazza, which surrounded the house was roofed in with red and white, and tables were placed here and there, on which was served a luxurious banquet. The murmur of the sea breaking on the rocks a few yards away, mingled with the sweet strains of the band.

The scene was one of weird beauty; electric lights gleamed everywhere outside and in; their radiance was tempered by the opaline shades which rendered the light soft and becoming to the beautiful faces of the ladies.

Mr. and Mrs. Decker stood just inside the entrance to the largest reception-room.

They were a noble-looking pair. She was a tall, stately brunette, her husband a manly blonde. Happiness seemed to have found a home in this magnificent sea-side palace, for the master and mistress looked as if they had never known a care.

The fur sex were enthusiastic on the subject of Mrs. Decker's boudoir. It was called the "Rose and the Lily Room," and was fitted up in the style of Louis XVI. White satin hangings,

embroidered with roses and lilies, adorned the walls; ivory panels, painted with groups of children's faces, were set in here and there; rugs of rose and white were scattered on the floor, and the furniture was of white and gold, upholstered in crimson and white plush.

"What rare old china!" cried one lady, who was a connoisseur. "It is worth a fortune."

"See those Roman lamps!" said another. "And that scarf on the piano. 'It was once Miss Du Barry's.'"

"How happy Mrs. Decker must be!"

"She has unlimited wealth."

"A handsome husband, who adores her."

"And two lovely children."

"Have you seen the nurseries? They are gems. A wide balcony, overlooking the sea; folding-doors between the day nursery and the night nursery. The cribs are sea-shells. Come and see them."

The nursery was a large room, with pale rose-tinted walls, and a white carpet flecked with rose petals. Everything in the room harmonized, even to the perfume that hung about the softly tinted curtains, and the chandelier where wax-lights burned in sockets of coral and gold.

A tall, slim woman in a white dress and lace cap stood near the door. She held up a warning finger.

"Are your charges sleeping, nurse?"

"Yes."

"May we have one peep?"

Half-reluctantly, the nurse held up a pink India silk portiere and revealed the inner nursery. In it there was nothing save two little beds veiled in lace.

The beds were shaped like pink and white sea-shells, and stood on feet of carved ivory.

In each bed slumbered a lovely child of two years, twin daughters of the host and hostess. Their little heads were dark and curly, their soft round faces flushed with health; long black lashes swept their smooth cheeks, and each tiny mouth looked like a crimson rosebud.

"How perfectly lovely!"

"Can you tell them apart, nurse?"

As the ladies whispered and gazed with eyes of admiration on the picture of sleeping innocence, the nurse, not wishing to have her treasures disturbed, signed to the guests to withdraw.

"I remained up here on purpose to see that nothing went wrong," she said, with quiet dignity. "There are two under nurses, but I let the giddy things go down with the other servants. I will not have the children disturbed."

"Are they delicate?" asked a motherly looking woman.

"They have never had a pain or ache."

"Do you know them apart?"

"Yes; Miss Meta's eyes are a shade darker than Miss Sibyl's."

"Meta! What an old-fashioned name!"

"She is named for Mrs. Decker's mother."

"I suppose they are dreadfully spoiled?"

"They are the sweetest little darlings I ever took care of, and I have nursed a great many," said the nurse, looking rather indignant that any one should be bold enough to suggest any disparagement of her treasures.

"How their parents must love them!"

"They do. They idolize them. I have, as I just said, lived in a great many families, but I never met a family that were so devoted to each other as this."

"Mr. Decker is an Englishman, is he not?"

"I do not know, madam. His wife is a Chicago lady, the daughter of Mr. Dowling, who is a great railroad king."

"Yes, so I've heard. Well, good-night, nurse."

That night Mrs. Decker wore jewels that were the envy of many of the richest ladies in Newport. Her gown of pale yellow lace was trimmed with sprays of pink carnations, and her ornaments were pink Neapolitan coral set with diamonds.

Her husband was devoted to her; he was a handsome man, of courtly manner.

An elderly gentleman assisted in entertaining the guests.

"Who is the old man?" inquired a stranger.

"He is Mr. Decker's uncle, Mr. Lohn."

"It seems to me I've seen that old man somewhere."

"And it seems to me I've seen Mr. Decker somewhere," said another guest, a famous doctor. "Yes, I remember the occasion. I attended his funeral somewhere, years ago."

A laugh greeted this remark. The doctor joined in the merriment, but still his face wore a puzzled look.

"Attended his funeral?"

"That is what I said. He was married to a girl I was once in love with myself, Louise Van Stretten."

"But, doctor, what do you mean?" asked a lady who had little sense of humor.

"If I were a theosophist I should say that our gallant host,

Mr. Decker, was the re-incarnation of one Clifford Derwent whose funeral services I attended years ago."

"Great heavens!"

"But this man is different in one respect," resumed the doctor, who, as he talked, was attentively studying Mr. Decker.

"What is that?"

"Well, it is now twelve years since Clifford Derwent died. He was then about thirty-five years of age. He would therefore now be near fifty."

"Why, Mr. Decker does not look more than thirty-five now."

"No. He is very like Clifford Derwent at the time of his death, but if Derwent were alive he would be a much older man."

As they talked Mr. Lohn strolled up, and one of the party introduced the doctor.

"I was quite surprised by the striking resemblance between your nephew and a man whose funeral I attended some years ago," said the doctor, addressing Lohn.

"In Savannah? You mean Mr. Vivian's?"

The doctor looked startled.

"No, Mr. Derwent's. In New York."

"Ah, I never heard of him. There was a gentleman in Savannah who bore a strong likeness to Decker. His name was Vivian. He is also dead."

"Then it seems to be fatal to look like Mr. Decker," said one of the group, laughingly.

"These chance resemblances occur more often than one supposes," Mr. Lohn said, carelessly.

"The resemblance I speak of is too striking to occur very frequently. Ah, here is another person who was present at the funeral I speak of."

"Good-evening, doctor," said a quiet voice. "Why, is it possible that you have introduced this subject of funerals at a time like this?" asked Mrs. Vandercliff.

She smiled reproachfully, and spoke in a tone of reproach.

"I merely said that the sight of my host's face recalled that of Clifford Derwent, whose funeral I attended years ago."

"Have you observed the striking likeness?"

"It was the first thing I thought of when I was introduced to Mr. Decker."

"And do you know that Louise Derwent; and Lillian Armstead, as I always called her—Lillian Vivian is such an awkward name to say—are both coming here to-night?"

"Not. Is it possible?"

"Yes; you know both their villains of husbands spent all their money. Louise's brother, Sidney Van Stratten, was rich, so it didn't matter to her; but Lillian Armstead's family were poor. Her money came from her first husband, and Vivian spent that before he died. She is as poor as a church mouse, poor thing!"

"And they are both coming here?" inquired Mr. Lohn.

Mrs. Vandercliff turned to him with uplifted eyebrows and a look of surprise.

"Pardon me, madam," said the old gentleman; "I forgot that I have not yet had the honor of an introduction. I am Mr. Lohn, Mr. Decker's uncle."

"Ah, indeed. I am happy to form your acquaintance. What was it you asked me?"

"I merely inquired if the two ladies, whose husbands my nephew is unfortunate enough to resemble, are expected to join us to-night?"

"Yes, Mrs. Decker is so hospitable; she said on her invitation card, Mrs. Vandercliff and party. Both the widows are visiting me, but my carriage would not hold us all, so I came with my next door neighbor, Mrs. Chandler, and my guests follow me in my carriage."

"And you never met Mr. Decker before?"

"No; I've just returned from Europe. I called on Mrs. Decker, for I regard myself as one of the habitués of Newport, and she was not home. So I had not the pleasure of seeing either Mr. or Mrs. Decker until to-night, when, like every one else, I was struck by the extraordinary likeness he bears to Mr. Vivian and Mr. Derwent. He looks as if he might be either of those men, providing time had been kind enough to stand still with them."

"It will be interesting to witness their meeting with him," said the doctor.

Mr. Lohn looked disturbed, and a few moments later he made a move and joined a different group of guests.

He soon left them and found his way to Mr. Decker's side.

"Marshall," he said, "there are two women coming here to-night who may be much affected by the sight of your face."

"Who are they?"

Decker turned hastily at the whispered words, and asked his question in an undertone.

"Mrs. Derwent and Mrs. Vivian."

"Indeed? Well, I am glad you told me."

"I thought it was best to put you on your guard."

Mr. Decker returned to his wife's side, and just then a party came forward to greet the host and hostess. The party consisted of a gentleman and three ladies.

The man was Frederic Vandercliff, and the ladies were his mother, Mrs. Derwent, and Mrs. Vivian.

Mrs. Vivian's eyes rested on the face of her host for a moment, with startled inquiry. She then turned quietly to Mrs. Decker, and replied to her greeting.

Mrs. Derwent uttered a long scream, then fell unconscious on the floor.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. DECKER IS SURPRISED.

The illness of Mrs. Derwent and its cause made a flitter of excitement. Much sympathy was expressed for the poor lady who had been so overcome by the sight of the man's face who so closely resembled her dead husband.

"Poor Louise!" said her friend Mrs. Vivian—"she is so weak and nervous."

"It is a wonder the shock did not affect you also. I hear that Mr. Decker looks very like your husband," said Dr. Salter to Lillian, later in the evening.

"He does."

"Perhaps you were prepared to meet Mr. Decker?" the doctor persisted.

He was somewhat curious.

"No; no one told me the man looked like my late husband. I must acknowledge, however, that the first look of his face startled me. I wish I had seen him first, so that I might have warned Louise."

"Your nerves are evidently stronger than Mrs. Derwent's."

"Yes, fortunately for me. Louise is a strange woman. I call her a mass of inconsistencies. She is so sensitive, so full of heart. Just now she is a spiritualist, and holds interviews with the dead. She has a medium living in the house. You know that sort of thing is fashionable."

"But why do you call her inconsistent on that account?"

"Oh, because I am a woman, and can't carry on an argument. I mean a woman to her mental make up, if sincere, would not treat Sidney Van Stratten as she does."

"How does she treat him?"

Perhaps the doctor had not forgotten his old romantic attachment for Louise Van Stratten. At any rate, he felt annoyed by Lillian's frank criticism of his friend.

"She does not bestow one thought on him. He is neglected in his own house, and when he was very ill last winter, went to a hospital."

"Good Heaven!"

"Yes; and while he was there ten days passed by before she called to see him. I went to her to learn how he was, and was horrified to find she did not know."

"I am surprised," was all the comment the doctor felt like making.

"No doubt you are. All this does not agree very well with her affectation of a loving nature."

"No, it certainly does not."

"Poor Sidney, he is so gentle, so unassuming, he never utters a complaint. His servants neglect him. Why, Mrs. Derwent's maid, Mrs. Derwent's nurse, are far more important people in the house than Mr. Van Stratten, and his money is all that stands between them and beggary."

"He has acted a noble part."

"His sacrifice has not been appreciated."

"Well, I shall have a little talk with Mrs. Derwent, and think I can bring her to a sense of what is right. Sidney is a good man and deserves better treatment."

"What a cold-hearted woman Lillian Vivian is," said the doctor a few minutes later, to Mrs. Vandercliff.

"You think so?"

"Yes. See how Mrs. Derwent was overcome by her feelings when she saw Mr. Decker, while Mrs. Vivian never changed color."

"Lillian does not wear her heart upon her sleeve."

"I do not think she has one to wear."

"No, but you believe Louise has; very well, doctor, women were made on purpose to puzzle men since time was young."

With this enigmatic remark, Mrs. Vandercliff turned away, and the doctor went to seek consolation from Mrs. Derwent.

As was but natural, the servants soon heard of the strange interruption to the festivities at Bleak Point.

Mrs. Vandercliff's maid had accompanied her mistress to the reception and had waited upon Mrs. Derwent while she rested in the dressing-room after her swoon.

"She looked awfully ill after she went back to the ball-room," said Celeste, "but she was very brave."

"Why should she make such a fuss because the man looked like her husband?" asked Madge Warren.

Both women were on the beach; Madge was there to look after little Clifford Derwent, and Celeste to wait upon her mistress, who was enjoying her sea bath.

"Well, you see she is a spiritualist and fancies she can communicate with him."

"I think the whole business is folly. I suppose the man does not look so very like him after all."

Madge spoke carelessly, but her large gipsy eyes were fixed on Celeste's face, and she awaited her reply with interest.

"Like him!" cried the excitable French girl; "he is his very ghost, his apparition!"

"Ah, I should like to see him."

"Well, you cannot understand the resemblance. You, who never saw Monsieur Derwent."

"I've seen his picture," said Madge, coldly. "See, is not this the gentleman now?"

Two men were strolling along the sand. One was Mr. Decker, the other his uncle, Mr. Lohn.

"Why, yes. How did you know?"

"By the resemblance to Mr. Derwent's picture."

As soon as the men were abreast of the two women, Madge said something rapidly in a language unknown to her companion.

Mr. Decker started violently, and turning rapidly, replied.

He had changed color and looked confused, and at a loss what to do.

Madge addressed him once more.

For a moment he hesitated, then answered sullenly, and catching his astonished friend by the arm, walked hastily away.

"Why, Madge," cried Celeste. "You know Mr. Decker, and what was that language you used?"

"I saw Mr. Decker years ago, in England."

"But what was it you said? Did you speak German?"

"Yes, I spoke German."

"But why not English, if he is an Englishman?"

"He speaks German. Now, hush up; I want to think."

Celeste was offended by her abrupt manner, but too much interested in the mystery to break up her friendship—for the present.

Madge did not say another word to Celeste, but her dark brows remained knit in a frown, and her eyes were gloomy and vacant. Her thoughts were evidently far away.

Once she spoke angrily to the little child, and so roughly pushed him away as he clung to her skirts, that he fell on the sand and cried loudly.

"Spoiled brat!" she said, stamping her foot, while her flushed cheeks and flashing eyes frightened the boy still more, and he whimpered pitifully, and put out his hands to Celeste for protection.

"Why, Madge, what has come to you?" asked Celeste, in amazement.

"Nothing. I am sick of that brat. He is so pampered and spoiled. I would like to fling him out there for the waves to sport with. I hate him!"

Again she stamped her foot, and in the gloomy depth of her eyes a strange mad fire burned like the glow in the heart of a ruby.

"Poor little boy, what has he done?" Celeste said, in wonder; and the child laid his little arms around the angry woman's neck and clung to her.

Madge burst into a passion of tears, and took the boy to her breast. She soothed him with loving words, and the child kissed her.

"Forgive me, Celeste," she said. "I have been rude and stupid. I have been thinking of old times, and when I give way to my temper for a time I am mad."

"Oh, I am not vexed. The sight of that Mr. Decker seems to upset every one. He must be the devil himself."

"Oh, he is a good man," said Madge, calmly, "only the sight of his face recalled old times to me."

"Perhaps he knew your husband in those days?" suggested Celeste, who was dying of curiosity.

"Yes," replied Madge, with white drawn lips. "He knew my husband."

CHAPTER XII.

"HER GIPSY BLOOD WILL SHOW ITSELF!"

Years before that day on the sands of Newport, a woman walked the streets of Paris one night, with an infant on her breast. She had that day been discharged from the Maison la

Pithe as a convalescent patient. She was a tall, upright woman, with a finely developed form, and a beautiful brunette face.

It was a bitterly cold night in December, and the crowd in the street thinned rapidly away as it grew later, till by midnight only an occasional passer-by strode briskly along the Boulevard Beaumarchais.

It was an humble quarter of the city, and the woman who struggled feebly along it was a stranger. She was alone, friendless, homeless, and penniless.

A thin shawl covered herself and the infant, and she clutched it tightly around her, but it afforded little protection from the biting wind that tore and tossed it as if in mocking.

The babe now and then uttered a faint gasping cry, and then its wretched mother wended her pace and sought to hush it by pressing it closer to her aching heart. On and on she struggled through the dark and silent street, now and then she drew near a wine-shop, and shrank away in terror from the noisy inmates who came forth reeling and shouting. On and on, aimlessly, hopelessly, and madly.

What was this woman in search of?

The river!

Snow began to fall, softly, gently. Like a blessing from on high, it came in soft graceful curves from the pure abode above, hesitatingly and lazily, as if wishing to prolong the moments as it fell upon the dark and filthy street.

The woman glanced up, the dark agony of her face growing sharper, the despair more thorough and intense. The babe on her bosom moved, its little hands writhed convulsively, and touched her face. They were icy cold, and wet with the chilly death damp once to be endured by every mortal soul.

She paused in her mad progress. She sank upon a doorstep and strove to warm the little clinging fingers by breathing upon them.

"It is dying!" she moaned.

Strange, one moment ago she had longed for the chill embrace of the Seine, now she tried to hold that feeble life by pressing it still closer to her breast. She tore aside the covering from her bosom and laid the tiny face close against her heart. As she did so the babe gave one more faint gasp, one more convulsive struggle, then it was still.

A soul had departed to God, who gave it.

"It is dead!"

A wild, despairing cry, unlike any human utterance, then she fell, her head striking on the pavement, and the quiet snow began to descend more rapidly. It had work to do. It must shroud these silent forms.

How unlike this scene was the moon-lit beach at Newport. The murmur of the waves as they gently caressed the beach, the strains of a band, now and then the sound of a soft laugh. The moon rode high on her imperial way along the royal purple path-way. The beach was no longer thronged by pleasure-seekers; most of them were in-doors, dancing, or on the cool piazza, enjoying the salt fragrance of old ocean's breath.

A woman was alone on the sand, and her face was resolute and moody in the cold golden light of the moon. Those dark eyes were full of brooding misery, the firm, shapely lips were set with determination. The woman, in her simple dark dress, as she noiselessly moved over the sand, looked like the specter of lost happiness—the spirit of revenge.

Her hands were knotted loosely together, and she regarded not the beauty of the night, nor was conscious of aught about her. Her brain was busy with visions of the past.

From the white pathway down the side of the cliff a man descended rapidly, and joined her.

She saw him and stood still. He was silent for a moment, then said:

"Well, Madge, so we meet again, after all these years."

"Yes, I knew the time had come, even before I saw you."

Her manner was composed and calm.

"Well, I suppose you expect me to do something to atone for the past?"

He spoke hesitatingly, as if uncertain what mood she was in.

"Atone for the past!"

Fire seemed to shoot from the dark, brooding eyes. A mocking devilishness sounded in her cry.

"Hush! For Heaven's sake, be quiet, Madge, I know I acted like a villain. I own it, and I am ready to do all in my power to make up for the past."

He drew nearer; he tried to take her hand, but she moved rapidly away.

"You see, Madge, it cannot do you any good to expose me now, even if you loved me, which I do not believe you do."

"No; there you are right."

"Well, I thought you were too sensible. You are a handsome woman, Madge, and you should marry again. In all probability, you could make a good match, if you took a little trouble,

People are not so particular here as to one's antecedents, you know."

"I presume not. I suppose not."

"No; and when you have a nice home, are happy, and have children around you, you will forget the past."

A shudder passed over her, a colder shade crossed her face, and her pale lips parted in a smile. Such a smile!

"So you see, Madge, it will be far better for all parties for us to let bygones be bygones."

"Yes, I suppose you think so. You have the happy home, the children around you!"

She could feel the damp touch of an infant's fingers on her breast, the deathly chill of a dying babe's face and hands resting upon her heart.

Still he regarded her calmly. They were face to face upon the sands, but their souls were countless leagues asunder.

"Yes, I am certain you have lost all love for me, Madge, so I do not mind telling you that I love my wife with all my heart. Never before have I loved a woman; all the others were but passing fancies. This is true love."

"Indeed?"

How little he realized the storm of passion that raged through this woman's brain.

"Yes, she is a true woman, a lovely character, and she suits me. We are happy."

"A true woman suits you!"

The depth of contempt in her tone cut even this man to the quick.

"I admit, Madge, I was formerly a bad man, but now, oh, believe me! I am changed. I am trying to live a good life—to do better."

His tone was eager, and, by his face, she saw that for once he told the truth. He meant what he said.

"I make my wife happy, and my children, they are such lovely little angels!"

Oh, how blind he was when he marked not the fierce flash of those eyes!

"You would enjoy seeing them die of cold and hunger, I suppose?" she said, with a curious tone, a sort of frightful humor, that chilled the life-blood in his veins.

"Heavens! Why, Madge, it is easy to see that you know nothing of the love a parent feels for a child. My little ones are twins; they are miniature editions of my wife, and I would die—yes, die a hundred times, before I would allow one pang to torture those darling little forms."

Tears stood in his eyes. He meant it, every word.

"Is that the case?" she asked, quietly.

Her face had changed as suddenly as though all the gloom had dropped from it, quick as a lightning-flash.

"Yes, Madge; and I hope to see you situated just as happily and pleasantly. Forget the past."

Never, in all the long years of tortured memory, had the tiny death-cold fingers clung to her breast as they did now.

"Forget the past! I am a gipsy!"

With unconscious dignity, which was almost majestic, she turned away.

"Now, Madge, never mind that foolish old idea. Gipsies can forget a wrong as well as any one else. You are a Christian, I suppose."

Madge turned on him—not angrily, but with a calm, queenly gesture.

"You had better talk to me of your soul next," she said, in a low tone. "Why not? You are capable of thinking that you can save your soul."

His face fell.

"My wife thinks so," he said.

"Certainly. She is so happy with you here, that she expects to meet you in heaven."

"Yes, she does."

He spoke humbly.

Madge laughed.

"Pious, worthy man!"

"Don't mock me, Madge! I know I do not deserve my happiness—I know it well."

"The charming babies! The happy home! The angelic wife! The prospects of heaven!"

A laugh, cold and mocking as the laugh of fiends, rang out in mirthless accents across the sand.

"Don't Madge, don't, for Heaven's sake!"

"Oh, 'Heaven's sake' does not appeal to me. I never expect eternal happiness."

"Why not?"

"I shall bid you good-night. Go home to your angelic wife, and say your prayers beside your lovely twins. I think you said you would not enjoy seeing them die of cold and hunger!"

"Madge, do not torture me by such talk."

"Talk! What torture is it to listen to talk?"

"I cannot bear it. Oh, Madge, if you only knew how I love those little ones!"

"Perhaps I can understand. You see I am a nurse now. I take care of Mrs. Derwent's baby."

"Has she a baby?" he earnestly asked.

"Yes, born five months after the death of his father, poor little fellow!"

"Indeed! How sad!"

"Very."

Madge now turned away, and was walking off without a farewell word, when Decker called her back.

"I have no wish that you should work," said he. "I will make you an allowance."

"Have you so much money, then?"

"I am well off."

"I understood the money was your wife's."

"Yes; her father put me in business. I can afford to make you an allowance."

"No, thank you."

"And, Madge, you will give me your word that you will not expose me?"

"I shall promise nothing."

"But, Madge, what good could you do by ruining me?"

"No good."

"Then leave me in peace. I know I acted like a villain; but surely you can forgive me. I am willing to do anything you ask in reason."

"I ask nothing."

"And you will not meet me?"

"No. When next we meet it will be because you have sought me."

Without another word she left him, walking rapidly away over the sand.

He was far from satisfied.

"Her infernal gipsy blood will show itself," he muttered. "There is no forgiveness in that nature. I wish I had never come to Newport. I dread her! Yet, after all, what can she do? If she denounced me I should deny the tale. Pahaw! I shall cast aside all scruples and fears. Now, for my midnight conference with Lohn. He, too, grows tiresome. Soon I must rid myself of him."

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. LOHN BECOMES ANNOYING.

In a delightful little room overlooking the sea, Jabez Lohn awaited the return of Marshall Decker.

The room was fitted up as a library and study, the walls were lined with shelves filled with books, and in a large closet, which was kept locked, there was a regular assortment of chemicals, and the appliances for experimenting with them—in fact, a well-appointed laboratory.

Mrs. Decker had rather a horror of this room. Like many other ladies, she associated the idea of chemicals with explosions, and often begged her husband to be careful and not blow up every one in the house.

Jabez Lohn was greatly altered from the stooped old man who had been the recluse of Spotswood. He was a tall, fine-appearing gentleman of middle age, with erect form, elastic step, and bright eyes. His hollow cheeks were well rounded, and wore the flush of health. He had dropped twenty years of his age.

"Well, Marshall," he said, as his nephew appeared looking somewhat pale and exhausted after his interview with Madge.

"I have been waiting for you for an hour."

He glanced at a handsome, black marble time-piece on the mantel.

"I was detained. What is wrong, Lohn? You asked for this private interview with so much mystery."

The old man looked disturbed and uneasy.

"The fact is," he said, after a little hesitation, "that the effect of our life elixir is wearing off."

"Well, we must repeat the dose," said Decker, listlessly.

"I have done so, but without effect."

"What?"

"You are much occupied, and I did not wish to trouble you, so I performed the operation myself, but it produced no effect."

"You have omitted some ingredients."

"No, I was careful to omit nothing."

Decker seemed to take little interest.

"The fact is," he said, calmly, "you are rather too old to be a good subject."

Lohn's face flushed angrily.

"Some years ago you came to my house in an exhausted con-

dition. Without my aid you would soon have been a dead man."

"I am aware of all that," Decker cried, impatiently.

"Yes, you are; but are you willing to do for me what I did for you?"

"Of course."

"Then you must devote yourself to this matter. You know what time and trouble it cost us to restore you to health and vigor. Sooner or later you will relapse into the same condition you were in when first I saw you."

"When I do I shall make no further attempts."

"What! You are willing to sink into your grave without an effort?"

"I am."

"What has come over you?"

"I have resolved that the whole theory is wrong; whatever is opposed to nature must fail in the end. Nature revenges herself on the rash mortal who dares to tamper with the laws."

"So you will suffer yourself to die?"

"Yes, I shall suffer myself to die. I am tired of the whole business, and wish I had never commenced it."

"Then you refuse to assist me?"

Lohn looked pale and angry, but he did not raise his voice; he spoke very quietly and calmly.

"No; I will assist you in a measure, and all that I have is at your disposal, but I cannot promise to shut myself up and work day and night in your behalf. You have our old experience to assist you. Go on and prosper."

"Thank you."

Lohn turned away, and Decker saw that the old man was desperately angry. He thought that probably no good would come from prolonging the conversation.

"Good-night," he said. "I am tired. Call upon me when you need my services. I am willing to do anything in reason."

Without waiting for a reply, he quitted the room.

He knew Lohn was desperately offended, and judged it best to avert an open quarrel.

"So, my man," exclaimed Jabez, when Decker was out of hearing, "you are a reformed character and refuse to have anything to do with the matter. It is your desire to renounce the devil and all his works? Very well, we shall see."

All night long he toiled on alone. Next morning he appeared at breakfast, looking pale and worn.

"I am sorry that you are not well," said Mrs. Decker, sympathizingly.

He had pleaded illness in reply to her kind inquiries in regard to his health.

"Yes, I think Newport disagrees with me; the air is too strong."

"But see how well all the rest of us are!"

"The children seem to thrive," said the old man, as the twins came in, looking fresh and rosy after a morning bath.

"Do they not?" the proud mother answered. "My precious pets, they were never so well as they are now. So bright and strong."

"They do look like pictures of health."

Decker seemed unaccountably annoyed by these remarks.

He sought to change the conversation, but Lohn kept returning to the subject of the twins, their beauty and intelligence, and of course the fond mother preferred that topic to all others.

"Run and play," said the father at length, when he found Lohn commencing another long panegyric on the children.

"Come, my pets, we will go out and build a house on the sand."

"That is not acting according to the Scripture," said Lohn, with a curious look in his deep-set gray eyes.

"I do not understand you," replied Decker, coldly.

"You are not so dense, as a general thing. I say it is not according to the Scriptures to build on the sand."

"Oh, I see."

"Something of the nature of a castle in the air, a house built upon the sand."

"You are too deep for me to-day," said Decker carelessly, and he followed the children, who in company with one of the nurses and two large dogs, were already in the hall.

Late that afternoon Mr. Lohn made his appearance in Mrs. Decker's boudoir, and announced that business called him away suddenly.

"How long will you be absent?"

"I cannot tell. You will hear from me very soon."

Mr. Decker was not at home, and the old man left a message for him, saying that important matters, requiring personal supervision, had called him from home.

He affectionately kissed Meta and Sibyl, and bade them good-bye. As the nurse said

"Mr. Lohn just hated the thought of parting with the children. He has been with them ever since they were born, and he loves them as dearly as their own father does."

Decker looked greatly disturbed when he learned that the old gentleman had taken his departure so suddenly.

"Where did he say he was going?" he inquired of his wife.

"Why, I never asked him," she said.

"How excessively thoughtless! Never mind, dear, we shall soon hear from him."

They did not, however. A month rolled away, and still there were no tidings of the absent man.

CHAPTER XIV.

"HE MUST HAVE A BITTER ENEMY."

"It is extremely provoking," said Mrs. Derwent indignantly.

"Well, Louise, if the woman is ill, she cannot help it."

"Ill! What nonsense! She is as well as I am, and if she were ill, what could be better for her than the sea air?"

"It must be fatiguing running up and down all day after an active boy, who is never still an hour in the day."

"Yes, the darling, he is so active and playful!"

"It must be very trying to any one who is not well, to take care of a child."

"I am sure I do not know what to do."

Mrs. Derwent looked ready to cry.

"I have so many engagements, and I suppose I shall just have to leave every thing, and go to New York for a nurse."

She sank into an easy-chair, and nearly wrung her hands.

"Can you not write to some of your friends who are in town," suggested Lillian.

"Oh, dear! and wait a week, and then the nurse will be strange, and Clifty is so afraid of strangers."

"He will soon make friends."

"And what shall I do in the meantime?"

"Mind him yourself."

"Now, Lillian, how unkind you are! Do you suppose I am strong enough to mind that boy, who never sits still a moment?"

"That is why poor Mrs. Warren is worn out."

"What stuff! You know servants are as strong as horses, and have positively no nerves."

"Well, Warren, as you call her, seems an exception. She looks ill, and, if I am any judge, her nerves are in a terrible state."

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes, poor woman, she is not far from either her grave or a madhouse."

"Great heavens! You do not mean it?"

"I certainly do. I wonder you do not notice how odd and absent-minded she is."

"Oh, Lillian, how shall I ever get rid of her before she does my precious darling some injury?"

Lillian was tempted to laugh at the sudden change in Mrs. Derwent's intentions. There was little sympathy between the two women though they had been friends, in society parlance, for years.

"I must really go and send her off at once. Stay; I'll send for her, for I feel too nervous to be alone with her. I have such a horror of insane people."

She rang the bell, and requested that the nurse be sent to her without delay.

Madge appeared. She looked very ill. Her eyes were dull, and her face deathly pale, while she seemed listless and weak.

"Oh, Warren," said Mrs. Derwent, nervously. "I think you had better go to New York at once. You seem to require rest, and Master Clifford is so active he must tire you out."

"He does."

The words were not spoken sullenly, but Madge's manner was peculiar, and Mrs. Derwent grew more alarmed.

"Very well; send him to me, and pack your things. Here is your money."

"Have you any friend you can go to in New York?" asked Lillian, kindly.

"Not in New York; I have friends nearer, thank you, madam."

"I am glad of that, Mrs. Warren; you look really ill. You need rest and kind care I am certain."

"Yes, madam, I need rest."

With a weary sigh she left the room.

"Dear me, where were my eyes when I never saw how crazy that woman was? How fortunate that she is willing to go without a fuss."

"Yes, I am sure she had trouble and she does not forget it, as some do. Poor thing, my heart aches for her, she seemed so friendless and desolate."



"THANK GOD, SHE IS FREE."—Chap. viii.

"Why, Lillian, you are really too silly; excuse me for saying so. The woman is all right, you heard her say she had plenty of friends. You have no sympathy with me, and I am sure I need it more."

Lillian opened her eyes.

"What do your troubles consist of?" she asked, with an amused smile.

"There, you take no interest in any one except servants, and such people. Here I have an engagement to go out sailing with Doctor Salter's party this afternoon, and I shall have to stay home with the child who is so tiresome."

"Take him with you."

"Now, Lillian, I really wonder at you. It is such bad form to drag a child around with one. No, I must give up the sail, and I am so fond of yachting. Then to-morrow I intended to go out riding with that delightful Spaniard. Oh, dear, no one was ever so worried as I am."

Lillian smiled, she did not offer to take care of the boy, for he was a spoiled child, and selfish as his mother.

She looked at her watch, and said quietly:

"I am sorry you should be disappointed, but that is a small penalty to pay for the pleasure of having a child."

"Oh, of course you can preach a sermon," said Mrs. Derwent spitefully.

She played nurse that day, and to Master Clifford's surprise and indignation, he got a good whipping before night fell.

That night something happened that aroused the interest of all Newport. Mr. and Mrs. Decker's beautiful twin daughters were stolen from their home.

The nurses were nearly wild, the mother was ill from grief, the father had gone to New York to engage detectives and offer rewards for the return of his children.

This was the news that startled all the fashionable throng assembled at the hotels and cottages.

Several intimate friends hastened to the villa at Bleak Point to offer advice and glean particulars.

Mrs. Decker was only able to see one or two, but the conscience stricken nurse, Mrs. Gordon, received the ladies and answered all their questions.

"Last night," said the nurse, "I was ill with sick headache and I went to my own room at ten o'clock. Mr. and Mrs. Decker were at the ball at the Grand Hotel. I left Prissy, the elder of the two assistant nurses, in the day nursery, with strict orders to remain there till I returned."

"I intended to lie down for a couple of hours, and then go back to the day nursery, where I have been sleeping every night since we arrived here. I felt very ill and extremely drowsy—in fact, unnaturally so, which is accounted for to-day by the doctor, who says I was drugged. I did not awake till two o'clock this morning; my head was aching more violently than ever, in fact, I was really ill. I felt angry because Prissy had not called me, I knew it must be after midnight because the house was so still and the moon so high."

"I hastened across the hall to the nursery and found to my surprise it was in total darkness. We always burned a light

there all night. After searching about in the dark I found the match-safe. I looked at my watch before I even lit the lamp. It was ten minutes after two. There was no one in the nursery, and before I went to scold Prissy for her carelessness, I went to take a look at the children. *They were both gone!*"

"And the girl Prissy?"

"Oh, Prissy says she came to my bedside and tried to rouse me, but could not do so. She then went out for half an hour, with some of the other servants, to look through the windows at the ball. When she came in there was a light in the nursery windows, and she took it for granted that I had awakened during her absence and gone to take charge as usual. To save herself the trouble of coming to see whether everything was right or not, and also, I suppose, to postpone the scolding she knew she deserved for leaving the nursery, she went to bed. The servants' rooms are in the back of the house and she went with the others up the back stairs to her room."

"And the light she fancied she saw in the nursery window?"

"That was no fancy; all the other servants saw it, too."

"Well, then, the thieves who stole the babies must have been in the nursery at that very time."

"Yes, and if that girl had come up even then, we might have caught them."

It was Lillian Vivian to whom the nurse was telling her story.

"Then this girl Prissy is the cause of the loss of the children?"

"Yes; she is going to leave the house before Mr. Decker returns, for she says she is afraid he will shoot her."

"One could scarcely blame him, but I do not suppose she thought the children were in any danger in their own home."

"No, I do not think she ever thought of anything worse than that one of them might wake and feel frightened on account of the darkness."

"Why did she leave them in the dark?"

"She has never handled lamps, and she was afraid to meddle with them. When I left her she was sitting by the open window in the moonlight. My head ached so that I did not think of the lamp."

"Well, it is very sad. What motive could any one have for stealing the little ones?"

"The hope of a reward, I suppose. I should not like to be in their places if Mr. Decker catches them. He looked terrible when he went away."

"No wonder; it is frightful to think of those little children in the hands of any wretch who was wicked enough to steal them."

"I believe Mr. Decker suspects some one. Oh, how he talked when I told him they were gone!"

"The robbers left no clew behind them, I suppose?"

"Nothing of any consequence, I fear. When Mr. Decker left the house I found this."

"This" was a curiously shaped match-box in the form of a clam shell. It was made of silver, and on one side it had a monogram engraved upon it—"Y. X. H."

"This may be of great importance," said Mrs. Vivian. "But one thing more I should like to ask. Do you suppose there is any possibility that the girl Prissy was an accomplice?"



"WELL, MADGE, WE MEET AGAIN, AFTER ALL THESE YEARS"—Chap. xii.



"'CAUSE HE BOILS DEAD PEOPLE AN' EATS THEM."—Chap. XV.

Mrs. Gordon pondered.

"I should not like to say anything one way or the other. She is a girl, engaged recently, and I know very little about her."

"Then I should say it would be advisable to keep her in your own hands till Mr. Decker returns."

"I'll inquire about her, madam. I only wish Mrs. Decker felt able to take any interest, but she is completely prostrated."

On inquiries being instituted it was learned that Prissy Wilson had already quitted the house.

"I did not know what to do," said Mrs. Gordon, apologetically; "and, to tell the truth, I feel as if I should be dismissed on the spot. Of course I know it is not my fault the children were stolen, but I cannot expect other people to feel as I do about it."

The poor woman broke down and cried bitterly.

"Do not reproach yourself, I beg," said Lillian, kindly. "I am sure no one blames you. If they do they are very unjust. But keep up your heart; the little ones will certainly be found."

"I hope so, I pray so. Their poor mother and father! Oh! I do not like to think of him; he will surely lose his senses."

"But, surely, the mother deserves as much sympathy."

"Of course Mrs. Decker loves her children, but she does not love them as her husband does. I never saw a man so devoted; he just worships them babies."

"Well, I trust they will be restored. I think it is not possible for any one to hide them from so wealthy a man as Mr. Decker. He has the means to employ the most skilled detectives, and no doubt the children will be found. Keep up your heart, nurse."

Lillian spoke more cheerfully than she felt. She had heard of cases where children of wealthy parents had been lost and never restored.

As she walked back to Mrs. Vandercliff's cottage she recalled the nurse's words, "I believe Mr. Decker suspects some one."

If he did he must have a bitter enemy whom he had reason to dread.

CHAPTER XV.

A LEAGUE AGAINST A REMORSELESS POE.

In a cottage in Hyde Park, Chicago, there resided an elderly gentleman, whose mode of life was somewhat peculiar. He lived alone; at least the woman who kept house for him always went to her own home at night, returning in the morning in time to cook his breakfast.

Mr. Morrison was his name, and his arrival in the city had been recent. He had moved into the cottage, and gradually furnished it afterward. He began with his bedroom; that was comfortably fitted up; then the kitchen and dining-room, and afterward his library or study.

He had informed his landlord that he was a medical man, retired from the practice of his profession.

He gave as his reason that his health had given way under hard work, and that he now devoted himself to scientific research.

"I shall make my enforced holiday useful," he said, pleasantly; "and when I am able to take up the active branch of my

profession again, my patients will have the benefit of my investigations."

All this was very satisfactory, and the landlord, an honest mason who had been lucky enough to acquire considerable property when its value was not so great, was not surprised that his new tenant should burn lights in his house the greater portion of the night.

"Sure he is studying, the creature," he explained to his wife.

"Will, I only hope he won't set foire to the place," was her reply.

"Oh, no danger," replied Collan, and dismissed the subject from his mind.

As the reader has guessed, the gentleman who devoted himself to study was none other than Jabez Lohn. He was known as Doctor Morrison. He was extremely quiet, paid his rent regularly, and was easily satisfied.

Therefore his landlord and his housekeeper were perfectly satisfied with the doctor.

For some time the stranger lived alone, but at length he engaged an assistant.

The fresh arrival was a medical student of unprepossessing appearance. He was tall, excessively thin, with a long, cadaverous face, red hair cut short and standing up like the bristles on a pig's back, and large, glassy eyes, which had an odd look of standing out like the bull's-eye on a lantern.

Mr. Doty was this young man's name, and the children in the neighborhood took a dislike to him, which they displayed in various ways. They called him names when at a safe distance; they hung stones after him and tied dead cats to the handle of the gate, because a rumor had arisen that Mr. Doty indulged in the practice of cutting up dead bodies and making soup of them.

No one knew how this story had originated, unless it was owing to the fact that the student had made a fire in the back yard and boiled something in a wash-boiler one night.

"There goes the cannibal!" cried the boys, whenever the unfortunate Doty appeared on the streets.

The ill-favored searcher after knowledge had sense enough to treat these manifestations with silent contempt, so they did not grow any worse.

"Why do you call that young man a cannibal?" asked a strange woman, as she passed along the street one day and saw the unfortunate Doty pursued by his attendant satellites.

"'Cause he boils dead people an' eats them."

She had been searching for a house in the neighborhood, and had engaged this boy's services as a guide.

"I guess not."

"Yes, ma'am, he does. Mother seen him the night he made the fire on the prairie, and she seen a dead man's head jumping around in the boiler when she took the liver off."

"Surely this is impossible."

"No, 'tain't, you ken ask my mother. She seen it. You know they ain't got much of a fence at the back; it's jist prairie; and he made a big fire, and brought out the boiler an' sot it on. While he was gone mother went into our yard; putty close our yard is to his'n. So mother thought she'd like to see what he was boiling; an' she went out an' lifted the liver, an' the dead man's head popped up an' his eyes looked at her. Awful! She



"'SHAW' YOU ARE AFRAID OF HIM."—Chap. XVII.

came home an' went into high-stricks. Oh, you jist ask my mother."

The strange woman readily surmised the truth.

"I suppose the young man is studying medicine."

"I guess so. The old gent he works for is a doctor."

"Is he?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then I should like to have you show me his house. I am a sick nurse."

"All right; come right straight 'long."

The boy was delighted; he could now combine business with pleasure by guiding the lady to the doctor's house and also follow Doty and shout "Cannibal!" at intervals.

The victim went on his way and at length drew up in his rapid pace at the "doctor's" door.

"Can I see the doctor?" asked the lady, as the hunted Doty unlocked the door with his latch-key.

"I'll see, madam. What might be your business?"

"A private matter," said the woman, with dignity.

"Oh, very well. Please walk in, ma'am."

He shut the door on his tormentors, for the guide had not been the only one to follow him home.

Presently the doctor came out of his bed-chamber to interview his visitor.

"I believe I have seen you before," he said, scrutinizing her sharply.

"I dare say you have. You were at Newport with Mr. Decker."

Madge, for she was the woman, sat calmly regarding the old man, who seemed disturbed.

"Yes, I was," he said slowly; "but what did you want?"

"I want work. I am a good nurse, and as you are a medical man I called to ask you to recommend me."

"Yes, yes. Let me think. So you are in want of work?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, let me see. You know Mr. Decker?"

He did not suppose she did, but wished to ascertain, for reasons of his own. Madge on the other hand was doubtful as to the amount of intimacy between Mr. Decker and his supposed uncle. Perhaps this old man might know all Decker's private history. So they both fenced a little.

"I knew Mr. Decker years ago," she said.

"Ah, just so. He is a friend of long standing."

"I said I knew him. I didn't say he was a friend."

Something in the gloomy dark eyes gave the old man the clew he sought.

"You hate that man!" he said, quickly.

"I have good cause to hate him."

"So have I—so have I. He is an ungrateful wretch."

"He is a devil."

"You are right, perfectly right. Why, dear me, how fortunate that you should have called here. You need work and I am in search of a housekeeper. Could anything be more fortunate?"

Madge hesitated.

"I have children," she said, slowly.

"Ah, you are a married lady. May I ask if your husband is living?"

"No matter, now; these children have to be taken care of. Can you tell me where I can get board and lodging for them?"

"Bring them here. I love little children. Dear me, how I love them."

"No, that would not do. I could not work if I had these little ones to tend. They are only babies."

"Oh, the work is very little. I am easily satisfied, and so is my assistant. Bring your children, by all means."

Madge reflected. This old man seemed incensed against Decker. She must try to ascertain more.

"Why do you dislike Mr. Decker?" she suddenly asked.

Jabez Lohm's eyes flashed.

"The dirty hound!" he said, fiercely. "I saved his life, and when I asked him to assist me, he refused, like the mean scoundrel he is."

"That is like him."

"Yes, but never mind; I shall be revenged upon him. A day will come when he will be in the same strait he was in before; then he will think of me and all my devotion and kindness. He repents, forsooth! Curse him!"

"Yes, curse him, I will help you. Magnify every injury he has done you tenfold, then you will know why I also long for revenge."

She sprang to her feet and seized the old man by the hand.

"You shall have it," he said, eagerly. "I will help you, and you will help me."

"Good! Now I believe I can trust you. I have already been revenged on him in part."

"Trust me? Certainly you can. I came here to Chicago because I thought he would be less likely to look for me here than in any seaport."

"Strange! I had the same idea."

"Well, we must unite our forces, and then we shall be stronger."

Madge paused. She was naturally suspicious, and she doubted whether the old man was acting in good faith or not. She determined to put him to the proof.

"Why do you wish to be revenged upon this man?" she asked.

"Sit down, and I will tell you."

She took a seat, and Jabez Lohm closed the door. He sat down near her, and said:

"No doubt you will think I am a madman to tell you what I now do. You will have two reasons for thinking so. One will be that the story I relate is beyond belief, the other, that even if it were true, it is folly to relate it to a stranger. Well, no doubt you will be right in the last supposition. However you may feel about it, I do not think I shall be doing wrong when I trust you. I have always been a student of the human countenance, and I judge that you are trustworthy. My story passes human belief, yet I ask you to accept it as truth."

"Four years ago I was a resident of the suburbs of Savannah, Ga. I lived at a place called Spotswood; it was a large plantation or farm, no longer under cultivation. I came there for certain reasons, which have nothing to do with my story. One morning I sat at my door, waiting the return of a messenger I had dispatched into the city for the newspapers, when a horse stopped at my gate way, and its rider, after appealing to me for aid, fell senseless at my feet."

"Of course I had the man conveyed into my house, and, with the assistance of my old housekeeper, brought him out of his swoon. After he had been fed and nourished he told me the strangest tale I ever heard."

"At first I thought, as you will think now, that my visitor was insane. Later I became convinced of the truth of his story. This man, after years devoted to study in all parts of the world, had discovered a rejuvenator, which he termed "Life Essence." By the means of this elixir he had, on three occasions, renewed his youth to such an extent that he passed among people with whom he was well acquainted as an utter stranger. After a considerable period of time the effect of this life renewer wore off, and had to be reapplied. Before doing this, life had itself to be suspended. The man, to all appearance, died; he then took on a new existence."

"The secret, this man said, he had partly learned from the Hindoos, and partly perfected himself. One man knew of it besides himself. He next asked me if I should prove a friend to him by allowing the transformation, if one can so term it, to take place at my house. He said it involved some time, and of course had to be performed with the utmost care and secrecy. I was much impressed and interested by his story, though I could scarcely give it credence. He readily secured my promise to place my house and also my purse at his disposal. He next wrote a note to a certain person in the city, which I sent my servant to deliver. Shortly after this a man arrived with a satchel containing various things for my visitor's use. The story is almost too long to relate, but I will be as brief as possible."

"This man went out to drive; his vitality was very low, and I was not surprised when I learned how he had died at the residence of a friend: He was buried in the family vault of his wife. I was surprised, however, when I was roused from my sleep on the following night by a carriage stopping at my door and being called upon to assist the servant in bringing in the body of his master."

"He brought the dead body in?"

"He brought the dead body in and laid it upon the bed my servants had prepared for the man the day he first appeared."

"But he was not really dead?"

"He was dead, to all intents and purposes. Respiration had ceased, the action of the heart was entirely suspended, and the body was ice-cold. Every symptom of death was present—even *rigor mortis*."

"Why did the servant bring the dead man to you?"

"Wait, and you will hear. I asked the man that question, and objected very strongly to the presence of the corpse. He told me that he had seen his master in the same condition on other occasions. He asked permission to arrange a hot bath. My servants slept in a small house at some distance, so we were safe from observation. I assisted the man, whose name was Gregory."

"Gregory Hamlin?" interrupted Madge.

"Yes; do you know the man?"

"I shall explain presently. Please go on."

"Well, Gregory prepared his elixir, or essence, from materials

contained in a small medicine chest. It was not swallowed, but injected into the veins by means of a hypodermic syringe. After making use of the elixir, the hot bath, and administering brandy, the dead man came to life again."

"He did?"

"He did. It was a long process, however. I saw that Gregory was beginning to grow discouraged. Neither did the result satisfy his master, when all that could be done was done. It was not entirely successful. The man looked very little younger or better than he had done before his death."

"And he was not satisfied?"

"No. He looked at his own reflection in the mirror, felt his pulse, and said: 'All but a failure. I guess this is about the last time I dare try that.'"

"He said so?"

"Yes. Well, we lived together for some time. He had told me his history, or, as I suspect, only a portion of his history. He had married a lady, whose fortune he had dissipated, and he was tired of her. By dying he had got rid of this woman. He was now prepared to woo and wed another heiress."

"And he did so?"

"Yes; but wait a little. He found the life essence, or revivifier, did not produce the usual results. In fact, in his case, it had lost its value. In mine it was singularly successful."

"In yours! Then you used it also?"

"I did, and dropped ten years of my life."

"Well?"

"I see that you are incredulous, and I do not wonder. Nevertheless, what I tell you is true."

"Of what is this wonderful elixir composed?"

"I have the receipt, but I find it no longer has the same power."

"Pshaw! He never gave you the true prescription. He is such a treacherous scoundrel that he could not tell the truth if he tried."

"You know him well?"

"Know him? I should say so. But tell me more of this mysterious essence. You believe in it?"

"I do. I have felt its marvelous fire thrilling through every nerve and fiber of my being. I shall try it again under the same conditions I did at first."

"What were those conditions?"

"Death."

"Why, you must be mad!"

"Do not judge too hastily. I could not make the essay before, because I had to work alone. When I asked his help, the infernal villain told me he would give me *reasonable* assistance. So, of course, under the circumstances, it was useless for me to try the experiment; not only useless, but dangerous. I began to dread him. I do not believe he would hesitate to bury me if I died."

"You know too much, and he would doubtless be glad to get rid of you."

"I believe so. Now you understand my motive for wishing to find an intelligent person in whom I can trust. This is why I have told you the story. Will you come here as my housekeeper and assistant?"

"I will."

"Bring your children. I will make them welcome."

"You will?"

"Certainly. I love children."

"You already love these."

"What do you mean? I do not understand you."

"You will understand when you see them."

"Why you don't mean to say—?"

"Yes, I do. They are Decker's twins."

An unholy light sprang into his eyes. Silently they pressed each other's hands.

CHAPTER XVI.

GREGORY'S SUSPICIONS.

Mr. Decker returned to Newport without having heard any tidings of the lost children. He looked thoroughly worn-out, his eyes seemed to have sunk far back in his head, and his face was sallow and wasted.

He found his wife very ill in bed. She was a nervous, sensitive woman, whose life had been one of ease and luxury. In fact she had never known a care.

Now that trouble had come, she wilted like a hot-house flower beneath the fierce breath of the feast king.

She made no effort to recover her usual tone and vigor, she just gave way.

To Mr. Decker's surprise he found that the only comfort his wife took was while Mrs. Vivian was with her. Lillian seemed

to understand her better than any one else. She ministered to her comfort without disturbing her grief, or forcing her to rouse herself.

"Lillian, stay with me," was her constant cry.

"I am willing to do anything for her," Mrs. Vivian said to Mrs. Vandercliff, "and she won't want me when she has her husband."

So she absented herself as soon as Mr. Decker returned.

The meeting between husband and wife was affecting.

"Oh, Marshall," she cried, "do not tell me that you have heard nothing of my darlings!" His face quivered convulsively. "My dear one," he said, sinking on his knees beside the bedside, "I can only hope."

"And pray," she whispered, very faintly.

The next moment he had to summon Mrs. Gordon. His wife had fainted.

"How fearfully weak she is," he cried, wringing his hands.

"Oh, if she also is taken from me!"

"Be calm, I beg you," said the doctor, who at that moment entered the room. "I know Mrs. Decker is terribly weak, but I do not think she is in danger. Any agitation at all is bad for her. Where has Mrs. Vivian gone to?"

"She has gone to Mrs. Vandercliff's," said Mrs. Gordon. "She did not think she would be needed now."

"I must ask you to send for her at once," the doctor ordered calmly, and under the circumstances his wishes were always carried out.

Mr. Decker looked wretched in the extreme. His home was desolate, his heart and mind torn by anxiety regarding the fate of his infants, and now his wife added to his misery by yielding to her trouble in this weak, helpless way.

He turned away and went out of the house, and descended by a flight of granite steps to the beach.

It has been said that nature has moods to fit with those of all earth's children; certainly on that day the ocean seemed to sympathize with the tortured spirit of the wretched man who stood regarding its restlessly tossing tide.

It was dull, gray, and seemed hopeless as it sobbed upon the shore; the overcast sky, the monotonous roll of the tide all seemed to say: "It is useless to struggle; hope is dead; lie down beneath these cool waters and rest."

For a moment he was tempted to accept the invitation; this man who loved life so well, was tempted to end his earthly existence then and there, but the thought of his children held him back.

"I must live a little longer to save them," he said, as if in reply to the moaning sea. "They are in danger, it would be cowardly to desert them. Oh, my loved darlings!"

With tears streaming down his face he turned away.

Then followed days and nights of maddening suspense. Detectives came and went, followed up clues which led nowhere, and produced lost children enough to stock a foundling asylum.

Mr. Decker spent the greater portion of his time writing checks to defray the expenses of these would-be Hawkshaws.

All of them were alike in one particular—they were all sanguine of success.

That his children would be speedily restored to him, the anxious father had assurances strong enough to allay his fears, if he could have trusted to them.

Unfortunately, such was not the case; he wandered about helplessly and hopelessly.

One day Dr. Salter met him on the stairs as he was on his way to Mrs. Decker's room.

"Why, Mr. Decker," cried the doctor, looking shocked, "I did not know you were so ill."

"Neither am I."

"Nonsense, man! You look fifty years of age! This will never do. Let me feel your pulse."

Decker laughed bitterly.

"Fifty years old, eh? I do not doubt it; I never look in the glass now."

Dr. Salter felt his pulse and looked sharply in his face.

"Mr. Decker," he said, gravely, "you must pay attention to what I say, or you will be laid on a sick-bed. Eat your meals regularly; I must see the housekeeper about what you eat."

"It is not necessary. I can give you the fullest information. I eat nothing."

"What! and you expect to feel well?"

"I did not say so."

"You expect to feel ill, then?"

"I am not particular about it."

"See here, my good fellow; this won't do. I have my hands full now with your poor wife."

"All this time I have never been informed what ails my wife."

The doctor hesitated.

"I greatly fear," he said, slowly, "that unless some important change takes place, Mrs. Decker's mind will become affected."

"Great Heaven!"

"She is in a fearfully nervous state. She fancies she sees her children in all sorts of horrible and impossible situations; and the strangest thing of all is that she associates your uncle with their disappearance."

Mr. Decker's face turned a ghastlier hue than before.

"Surely not," he muttered, and sank at the doctor's feet in a dead faint.

"Here's a nice business!" cried Doctor Salter, and he called to a footman who at that moment passed through the hall, and the master of the house was carried away to his bed.

Gregory was soon in attendance. He had grown old in his master's service. He looked on and obeyed the doctor's instructions without a murmur, but he was much relieved when the doctor was called away to attend to Mrs. Decker.

He closed the door and unlocked a small medicine chest with a key he wore on his watch-chain. He next proceeded to administer a hypodermic injection in the patient's leg, below the knee.

After waiting half an hour, he again used his syringe—this time in the arm.

Gregory sat near the bed on which his insensible master lay. In appearance, he was a model valet. His hair, slightly tinged with gray, was worn short; his face was clean shaven, pale, and in expression inscrutable. He was carefully dressed in glossy black, and his linen was faultless. A slender gold chain ran across his waistcoat, and he carried a valuable stop-watch.

He sat in perfect silence for half an hour longer; then he once more administered the injection—this time over the chest, near the heart.

The man had grown anxious. He felt the cold, clammy forehead of the unconscious man, rubbed and chafed his lifeless hands.

He next poured out a large glass of brandy in a peculiarly shaped cup which he had taken from his medicine chest. This he poured down Mr. Decker's throat.

In a few moments the heart began to beat, the lungs resumed action, and the man slowly opened his eyes.

"You?" he said, with satisfaction.

"Yes, sir; drink this."

A powerful cordial, of a beautiful opaline color and exquisite perfume, had been placed in the cup.

He eagerly swallowed it.

Now his heart began to beat more rapidly. His pulse grew stronger.

Gregory knew, from experience, the drugs which would give strength to his master. In about an hour Mr. Decker was so far restored as to be able to dispense with his valet's attendance.

He had all a father's anxiety for his beloved twins, and he urged Gregory to try his skill as a detective and endeavor to find them. His confidence in his faithful valet was unbounded, for he had saved Hamlin from a disgraceful death.

To avert suspicion, it was decided to permit the regular detectives to continue their quest, without the knowledge that Gregory Hamlin had also gone on the trail of the lost children.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WOMAN'S HINT HASTENS AN ENGAGEMENT.

Lillian had been for over two years filling a position as matron of a private hospital for nervous patients in the suburbs of Boston.

Some of her friends had allowed her to drop out of sight, but Mrs. Fred Vandercliff was as generous as she was gay and thoughtless; she liked to talk of her friends, but would not do any one an injury intentionally.

She insisted on keeping up her acquaintance with Lillian, and finding her looking somewhat worn and overworked, fairly forced her to return with her to Newport. She had been in Boston for a few days.

"There is plenty of room," she said, "in my cottage for just a nice party of old friends! Louise Derwent is to be there with that extraordinary child of hers. I don't think I can stand her without an antidote."

In response to this invitation Lillian came, and events followed which brought her to Mrs. Decker's bedside.

Sidney Van Stretten was a guest of Mrs. Vandercliff. That shrewd little woman had read his secret as quickly as she did Doctor Salter's, who soon began to think that one of the best women in the world, for a wife, was Louise Derwent. Sidney loved Lillian with a love which had been the growth of a lifetime.

Long ago, when she had been his sister's schoolmate, he had learned to love her; he had seen her often in those days, but kept his lips silent, for he thought she was too young to be a wife. Then she returned to her home in the South, and the next thing he heard was the story of her betrothal to the old soldier, her father's friend.

Next came her marriage to Algernon Vivian, and after that he saw her no more.

Now she was free, her money gone, and to other eyes her beauty faded.

Mrs. Vandercliff said nothing to Sidney or Louise of her knowledge of Sidney's secret.

Louise Derwent would hate the idea of Sidney's marriage," she said, shrewdly. "She would be afraid it might interfere with the prospects of that wonderful baby. Never mind, Sid is an old dear, and Lillian is the best woman who ever lived, and has seen a lot of trouble. So, if I can help them I will do it."

And she kept her word. In a conversation with Sidney she said to him:

"I know you love Lillian; and, better still, I know she loves you."

His eyes flashed with joy and pride.

"I gladly acknowledge the first," he said; "but, Nettie, do you believe that she loves me?"

"I do."

"If you are right I am the happiest man in Newport. I have loved her so long, so hopelessly."

"Cheer up; your love is hopeless no longer. I know she loves you. I have seen that beautiful dark face flush when she heard your step, and her eyes grow bigger and brighter when your voice caught her ear. She loves you; but Lilly is a shy bird. You must woo her gently, Sid, for she herself does not yet know her heart is won."

Sidney Van Stretten felt happier than he had for years. He was a man who was too modest to estimate himself properly. He had always been shy and diffident. Perhaps if he had been bolder, more self-asserting Lillian Tatnall would have been his wife years ago.

"I shall go over and see her," he said to Nettie Vandercliff.

"Do you wish to send her any message?"

"Yes. Tell Lilly I want to see her very particularly this evening."

Sidney strolled to Bleak Point across the beach. It was a lovely afternoon, and the sea murmured softly and gently as it kissed the sand. It seemed in accord with the feeling of shy happiness which filled the heart of the lover.

Lillian had a few moments to herself, for her charge was sleeping.

She came down to the library, where Sidney awaited her, looking tired and ill.

"Why, Lillian," exclaimed Sidney. "You look like an invalid yourself."

She glanced at a mirror which filled the space between two windows, and said, "I am a pretty good imitation of an invalid, am I not?"

"Take care you do not become a real invalid."

Something new, unusual in his tone and in the deep tenderness which shone in his face, made Lillian look up, and then and there she read the story he longed to tell.

A deep rich flush suffused her face.

"Lillian," said Sidney, "I am afraid to ask the question which will bring about such results to me. Happiness and joy, or desolation and misery. You know I love you, but you do not know that I have loved you ever since the first time I saw you so many years ago."

She cast the long black lashes down on her cheeks, her lips trembled but no sound came from them.

"Nettie warned me to be careful; she said you were a 'shy bird.' Lilly, can I hope to win you; tell me, darling?"

The beautiful white hand toyed nervously with the ribbons and lace on her dress, then was timidly, gently extended and eagerly grasped in the warm clasp of her lover's hand.

"Mine!" murmured Sidney, as he drew the dark queenly head on his breast.

Sidney Van Stretten's wooing progressed rapidly, and he was one of the happiest men alive until he learned that Mr. Decker bore a strong resemblance to his sister's husband, and also to the late husband of his beloved Lillian. Furthermore, it was also remarkable that Gregory Hamlin had acted as servant to all three!

Disturbed by the most perplexing thoughts, Sidney said.

"I must see this Mr. Decker to-morrow."

When he tried to carry out his resolution, he found that it was too late. Mr. Decker had started for New York in answer to a telegram from Gregory Hamlin.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. DOTY SCENTS A PLOT—THE MAN TURNS AGAINST THE MASTER.

The neighbors were very much interested when Madge moved into the cottage with her two children and the former housekeeper was discharged.

The latter was a somewhat pugnacious Irishwoman who had been enjoying what the boys who were so warmly interested in the cottage and its inmates termed a "soft snap."

Naturally Delia O'Brien resented his hasty dismissal, and she was not slow to express her opinion on the subject of the new housekeeper, her late employer, and matters in general.

"Shure it's a noice crowd ye'll be, furriners that ye are. Phat business have ye in America at all at all, I'd loike to know? As for that red-headed cannibal, I'd lay me loife he'll be makin' away wid thim twins insode of a wake. Shure I'll be after telling the landlord, Mr. Collan, to kape his eye on the crowd of dirty thrash!"

With many such complimentary speeches, Delia packed her belongings, shook the dust of the cottage from her feet, and departed breathing out threatnings and slaughter against the doctor, the cannibal, the new housekeeper, and all concerned.

Madge began to abuse the children, snarling at them, and sometimes cruelly beating them. Doty interfered, and threatened to invoke the law if the children were again maltreated. Morrison then tried to get rid of Doty, but he failed to take the broad hints that were thrown out. Then Doty began to suspect that a plot was maturing for his removal.

His suspicions were not unfounded. Before leaving Delia O'Brien had intimated that the children were to be murdered.

Jabez spoke of this remark in a conversation with Madge, and with a steely glimmer in his eye, suggestively asked:

"Why shouldn't I have him arrested for the murder?"

* * * * *

When Mr. Decker arrived in New York in response to Gregory Hamlin's telegram, the valet met him at the depot.

"What news?" asked Decker, impatiently. He was worn and haggard from want of food and sleep. The suspense was killing him.

"Madge has the children."

"Thank Heaven!"

Gregory looked surprised. His master caught him by the arm

"Gregory," he said, in a hoarse whisper. "You do not know the truth. Lohn has a horrible theory on the subject of the elixir. He tried some experiments in the South."

So frightful had Decker's face grown that people in the crowd gazed at him with surprise and apprehension.

"Compose yourself, sir," whispered the valet, "you will gather a crowd."

With a violent effort he calmed himself, and clinging to Gregory's arm, made his way through the crowd to a carriage.

They were driven to a hotel before he spoke again.

"Now," said Decker, when they were safe in the suite of rooms Gregory had engaged, "tell me all."

"Well, sir, I traced Madge from Newport to this city. The children cried and fretted a good deal and people noticed them on that account. What possesses those detectives the Lord only knows. I did not experience the slightest difficulty in tracking the woman though so much time has been lost."

"Stupid fools!"

"Well, that depends. As long as you paid them whatever they asked, they had no particular object in bringing this business to a close."

"Well, you have found Madge; let us go to her at once and get the children."

He sprang from his seat.

Gregory looked mortified.

"Have a moment's patience," he said; "I did not say I knew where she was now."

"Ah, you have lost her again."

He sank down in deep disappointment, his face more haggard and care-worn than ever.

"It is this way. The gipsy brought the twins to New York. She took them to a furnished room house on Twenty-fourth street, near Sixth avenue. She lived there for a week, then she left very suddenly. Some of her luggage is there still."

"And the people who have charge of it?"

"They do not know anything about her."

"Then she may have met with some accident—been run over. Were the twins with her when she left?"

"Yes; she never stirred out without them. She bought them plenty of clothing and fed them well, in fact, took good care of them, but the woman said she was harsh to them, and they fretted."

"My poor little darlings!" cried the wretched father, and he broke down and wept bitterly.

"Keep up your heart, sir," said the valet; "as long as she didn't starve and beat them, you can't complain."

"As long as that old fiend has not got them, torturing them with his vile attempts to prolong his useless life!" exclaimed Decker, rising and pacing the floor.

"Excuse me; I do not understand you."

"No, I am aware that you do not. Gregory, I am ashamed to tell you that I took part in his experiments."

Gregory seemed mystified.

"He had read somewhere of an obsolete practice among the ancients of using young children to prolong life."

"But how?"

"By transfusion of blood—draining the life-blood of young, vigorous children into his withered veins."

"Well, of all I ever heard!" cried Gregory, aghast with horror, "and what became of the children?"

"They lingered on from day to day, till weakness overpowered them."

"And they died then?"

"Yes, they died."

"So it seems he murdered these children in cold blood?"

"That is what he did."

"And you looked on—more than that, you helped him?"

"Yes, I must acknowledge that I did."

"Well, then—how did you get hold of these children?"

"They were little colored children. He advertised for them; said he was going to adopt them, and made their parents believe he sent them North to school."

"Great heavens! Where were the old cook, the husband, the crazy negro, and myself, while this murdering went on?"

"You had gone North for me; the old negro, his wife, and Laf were never there at night."

"And you drained away the life-blood of these poor children?"

"Yes; at night we made our experiments; then they were under the influence of anesthetics."

"And after they died?"

Gregory still preserved the same calm, inscrutable face, but something in the tone of his voice struck a chill to the heart of his master.

"We buried them in the cellar."

"How many children did you murder?"

"I am not sure; four, I think."

"You think?"

"Lohn was the instigator of the whole thing. After all, I do not know that it is worse than vivisection."

"Well, Mr. Decker, or Warren, or Vivian, or Derwent, whichever name you prefer, I shall now bid you good-by. I have not made up my mind yet as to whether I shall reveal your hellish doings or not. But I do know that if Lohn gets hold of your twins and serves them the same way, it serves you right."

Decker sprang to his feet, his face transfigured with amazement.

"Gregory!" he cried, as Hamlin made for the door.

"Hold your accursed tongue!" exclaimed the man, with fury in his face and fierce contempt in his voice. "Dare to address me again, and I shall denounce you to the authorities. Devil! fiend! go and end your miserable life! You have polluted the earth too long. Die, and make room for better people."

Decker recovered from his stupor of astonishment by a supreme effort.

"Oh, indeed! Ungrateful murderer, whom I rescued from the gallows!"

"I am the murderer of a man, you cowardly villain! Keep back, and let me go in peace, or I shall be the murderer of an accursed fiend!"

So Gregory Hamlin left the master he had served so many years.

Decker owed this man money, but Hamlin never asked for one cent of it.

He wiped his pale face, and walked hurriedly away from the hotel.

He had some luggage there, but he never bestowed one thought upon it. On and on he hastened, his master's frightful confession ringing in his ears, and crimson spots dancing before his eyes, as though the heavens were raining blood.

Decker sat for hours where Gregory had left him. He was ill, exhausted, and maddened by suspense and misery.

"He told me to put an end to my life!" he muttered. "Good advice, I am inclined to think, deserted by Gregory!"

He rang the bell, and ordered brandy. He drank himself into a stupor; then, assisted by a waiter, whom he had fed liberally, he tumbled into bed, and was unconscious for hours.

CHAPTER XIX.

DOTY MAKES A REVELATION TO DELIA.

Delia O'Brien, who had been dismissed from her position of housekeeper to Mr., or rather, Doctor Morrison, had a friend who was the proprietor of an intelligence office.

Delia kept her eyes on the cottage, for she could not get over her aversion to the woman who had deposed her, nor the master who had dismissed her so unceremoniously.

Madge was not one who made friends; her dark, sullen face prejudiced people against her, and her manner was far from conciliatory. As she grew older, she brooded over her troubles more than even in her youth, and Jabez Lohn realized the truth, namely, that the woman was nearly if not quite insane.

Of course Delia O'Brien knew nothing of all this. She only saw in the new housekeeper a proud, sulky English woman, who had secured an easy place, which Delia wanted to retain, and she vowed vengeance, and meant to have it.

She had taken up her quarters at the house of Mr. Callan, the landlord. He it was who had recommended her to the doctor. "I'll stay wid you, Mrs. Collan," she said, "till I get a place. Shure we are all ould neighbors from the County Kildare, an' I'm handy to have around."

Mrs. Collan was a good-hearted countrywoman of Delia, and had no objection to the girl staying at her house until she procured another situation.

Delia took much satisfaction out of passing and repassing the cottage. If any one was at the door, or in the front room, she made audible comments on the state of the windows, front stoop, etc.

Soon after the day on which the quarrel between Madge and Doty took place, Delia was going by, as usual. She did not see any of the inmates, so she said nothing, merely contenting herself by tossing her head, and glancing at the cottage with lofty contempt.

At a little distance she came on Doty, who stood beside the railing of a vacant lot, looking melancholy in the extreme.

Delia had been good friends with the student until the day she was discharged, when she had included him with the other members of the family in sweeping condemnation.

As she saw him she scented the battle from afar, and came sailing along with her guns shot.

Doty disarmed her, however, before she had time to utter a word by advancing toward her in the most friendly manner, and saying:

"Oh, Delia, I was waiting in hopes of seeing you."

"What do you want wid me?" asked Delia, only half appeased.

"Delia, you were smart enough to see that there was something wrong about that woman who brought those children to old Morrison's."

"It's true for ye, I was."

"You were right. They got rid of you, and they have been trying hard to get rid of me."

"They have, eh?"

"Yes; the woman is cruel to the children, and of course I couldn't stand seeing them ill-used; and when I interfered they both flew at me and ordered me out of the house. I told them pretty much the same thing you did. I said, 'You had an object in getting rid of Delia, and now you are trying to get me out of the house.'"

"So ye towld them that?"

"I did. I am not smart, and I dare say I should not have thought of it if I hadn't heard you say it."

"Faith, I well believe it," said Delia, composedly.

"So I want you to keep your eye on the place, for I believe they have designs on the children."

"But what are you going to do?"

"Listen, Delia. I intended to stick it out, and stay in spite of them, but they have commenced to drag me."

Delia's jaw dropped, and her healthy Irish face lost its ruddy hue.

"Is it pizenning ye they are?"

"Yes; I feel stupid and sleepy all the time, scarcely know what I am about; and one of the children is ill also. I can't stand it, so I shall clear out; in fact I am not going back. Now, Delia, I have faith in you to see that nothing happens to those poor little children. You know the landlord; get him to look into the case."

"Shure I don't know about him; he is a great man for minding his own business."

"Well, I am going to the society for protecting children, and that is all I can do. I'd stay, but it is no use if they drag me. I know those twins are not that woman's children; they came

from some sea-side place, and their nurse's name was Gordon. I have found out that much."

"Well, I'll do me best. You go to the society; they are the best people for this business."

"Yes. I've heard of them. Now, I must say good-by, Delia. Be sure you don't lose sight of these poor, defenseless children."

Tears stood in Doty's large eyes as he shook Delia's hand and hurried away.

"Poor fellow!" cried the good-hearted girl. "I always looked him."

She turned back and strolled past the cottage again. When she came in sight of it she saw old Lohn upon the stoop.

He was gazing anxiously up and down the street. He had already missed Doty.

"Good-evening, Delia," he said, affably.

"Shure is it to me ye are addressing yer insultin' remarks, ye ould blackguard?"

"Insulting remarks! I merely bade you 'good-evening.'"

"An' a great liberty I call it to bade anny decent girl 'good-evening'!"

"Surely that is a new code of manners," said Jabez, with a smile.

"Ah, I know manners as well as ye do. How is yer iligent housekeeper?"

"Mrs. Warren is well."

"Mrs. Warren? So that's her ladyship's title? Well, it's meself was thinkin' she wor an Injun squaw from the Woild West show."

"She is an Englishwoman."

"Indade! Well, I wish ye joy of her. How are the two purty children she kidnapped?"

"Now, Delia, you are really going too far. They are her own children."

"So am I her own choild, at the same toime an' be the self-same tokin."

"Nonsense, Delia, you have no reason to be angry with Mrs. Warren. I took her for a housekeeper, because she is an old acquaintance of mine. She was badly treated by her husband."

"An' where is he now?"

"He is in England."

"An' what is she doing out here without him?"

"Don't I tell you he ill-treats her?"

"I am glad to hear it. If there was ever a woman that deserved ill-treatment, it's herself."

"Why, you must be mad! What has she ever done to you that you should be so bitter against her?"

Delia had been merely talking because she wished to linger around the cottage till she saw the children.

Now, her patience gave out, and she said good-evening, and walked off without ceremony.

"Where is that stupid fool of a Doty?" old Lohn asked himself, anxiously.

He had ample time to repeat the questions, for Doty never returned.

Delia O'Brien lost no time in telling Collan all the suspicions entertained by the student and herself.

As she expected, the man made light of them.

"Ye must be as crazy as Doty himself, Delia," he said good-naturedly, and thought no more of the matter.

Delia's attention was also drawn away for the time by receiving a message from her friend, who kept the intelligence office, requesting her to call at once.

As her friend lived on the west side, she made up her mind to take her satchel with her and remain a few days.

"Now," she said to Mrs. Collan, "if there is murder done at the cottage, ye needn't say I didn't warn ye."

"For shame on ye, to scare a body so," cried the woman, looking alarmed.

With this warning Delia took her departure.

She found her friend Mrs. Styles very much disturbed by an order for a complete staff of servants for a house on Bellevue, place, which had been closed for the season.

"The family intended to be away all summer," said Mrs. Styles, "and their servants were all engaged to come to them again in the fall. Now, they are off in every direction; some are at the lakes, some gone East for a vacation, and here, all in a hurry, they are wanted."

"Then the place would only be temporary?"

"I do not know. Mrs. Decker keeps a great deal of help. I guess if a girl suited she would be kept on even after the old help came back."

"Is she a nice lady?"

"You can bet she is. Her father is Hammond, the big rail-

way man. He is rich as a Jew, and Mrs. Decker is his only child."

"Rich people is maner than poor people some toimes."

"Mrs. Decker is not mean. Anyhow you would not have anything to do with her. The housekeeper is the one who has all the say in the place."

"An' who may she be?"

"A lovely lady—Miss James. She is a Southerner, and so nice. Any one who can't get along with Miss James had best give up trying."

"Well, I'll think about it."

"Nonsense! You are a girl I can recommend, and they are scarce. Come! they want a head housemaid—what we call a girl for chamber work; but the Deckers are English, at least he is."

"I don't loike English people, but may be I'll try it."

Mrs. Styles had the gift of persuasion, and she soon convinced Delia that the place was made on purpose for her, and she for the place.

Delia felt sorry that she could not keep her promise to Doty, but she was a poor girl, and must think first of all of dollars and cents.

So it happened that the children were left without protection in the hands of old Jabez and Madge Warren.

CHAPTER XX.

THE WAY A REAL DETECTIVE WORKS.

When Decker rose next day, he felt more thoroughly wretched than ever in his life before. He was deserted by Gregory. He was helpless, and knew not which way to turn.

"My best chance will be to see one of the detectives and give him the clew furnished by Gregory."

He ordered a carriage and drove to the inspector's office.

That gentleman was in and gave orders that Mr. Decker be shown to the inner office the moment he saw his card.

"Good-morning, sir," said the officer, and a look of astonishment came over his face as he gazed upon the haggard countenance before him.

"Good-morning." Decker took a seat, and pressed his aching head with his hand, while he said, "You have made no progress, of course?"

"We have learned nothing new, sir; but we have some of our best men at work."

The inspector's tone was stiff, and he reddened. He did not like that "of course."

"I see you misunderstand me," Mr. Decker said, wearily. "I said you had heard nothing yet, or I should have been informed—at least, that is what I meant."

"No offense, sir. I am sure you believe we are doing our best?"

"Certainly I do. I have come to give you a little information I came across in a roundabout way."

"Yes, sir."

The inspector was prepared to listen to any amount of information and receive any amount of assistance, and make up his mind afterward to take it for what it was worth.

He knew that this sort of thing was a part of every case.

"I have learned that the children were seen in the company of a woman in a lodging-house on Twenty-fourth street, near Sixth avenue."

The officer made a note and looked interested.

"This woman is an English woman, a gipsy. She was until very recently in the employ of Mrs. Derwent as a nurse."

"This information is reliable?" asked the inspector.

"Of course. The woman left her situation, or was discharged, on the day before the disappearance of my children."

"She was at Newport then?"

"Yes; Mrs. Derwent is a guest in Mrs. Fred Vanderhoff's cottage. The woman has been acting in such a strange manner that her mistress began to fear she was insane."

Mr. Decker had kept himself well posted about Madge.

"How long since she was seen at the Twenty-fourth street house?"

"That is more than I can tell you."

He had intended, of course, to make all possible inquiries, but was prevented from doing so by Gregory's abrupt departure.

"I think, however, that she went direct to this place when she left Newport. The people are, I understand, old acquaintances of Madge's; that is the woman's name."

The inspector looked mystified. There seemed to be something more in this case than he had been aware of!

"Well, sir?"

"She remained there a week or so, then disappeared, leaving some of her luggage behind her."

"You have seen these people?"

"No; I want you to send a man—one of your smartest men—to find out the house. I do not know the number, but it is near Sixth avenue."

"I'll attend to it right away."

He rang a bell and directed that Jessop be sent to him at once.

A young man appeared. He was thin and slender, wore a clean-shaven face, and looked like an actor—one of those young men who play subordinate parts and are awaiting their promotion.

"Jessop, go to Twenty-fourth street, near Sixth avenue. Find out which house in that neighborhood had a lodger with two little girls within the last six weeks. Look sharp and bring me the number."

"I'll wait here for this gentleman's return," said Mr. Decker.

"Very good, sir."

Mr. Jessop made a bow and vanished.

Mr. Decker insisted upon the inspector going out to lunch with him. They returned in less than an hour and found Mr. Jessop waiting for them.

"Here is the number, sir," he said, handing his superior a card. "The lady with the two children was there five weeks ago, and left suddenly. She left some luggage, which is there still."

"Very good, Jessop. Hold yourself in readiness to go anywhere at a moment's notice. You are now engaged on the Decker abduction case."

Jessop looked gratified, and withdrew.

"Now, Mr. Decker, I know you want to go and see these people. Have you any objection to taking me along?"

"Objection? I was about to beg you to come if you can spare the time."

"I can, with pleasure."

The inspector felt ashamed that his men had suffered Madge to slip through their fingers, but he also blamed Mr. Decker for withholding information.

He guessed that gentleman knew more of the woman Madge than he chose to tell.

When they reached the house they rang the bell and inquired for the landlady.

A small, round-shouldered woman appeared. She had a cadaverous face, the skin of which seemed stretched tightly over the bones, but which was still profusely wrinkled. Her eyes were deeply sunken and wore a spiteful look, which was enhanced by the habitual sneer that curled the thin lips back from the uneven yellow teeth. On each cheekbone there was a bright red spot, while the rest of her face was a peculiar ghastly white. Her forehead was very high and jutted out over her eyes, and, altogether, the woman made a bad impression on the inspector.

"We called to inquire for Mrs. Warren," said Mr. Decker.

"I don't know anything about her, but if she does not turn up pretty soon, I shall sell her trunk for storage."

"I've called to pay the storage and take the trunk away," said the inspector, pressing Mr. Decker's arm as a hint for him to be silent.

"Well, I don't know what to say," Mrs. Cummings said, doubtfully. "There seems to be somethin' queer about her."

"Why, madam, what makes you think so?" asked the inspector, blandly.

"Why, there's been a young man here to-day after her."

"That is not so very remarkable."

"No; only she did not seem to have any friends, an' now they are all turning up at once."

"You have been acquainted with her for some time? You knew her when she lived at Mrs. Derwent's house?" the officer suggested.

The woman flashed a keen look from her rat-like eyes, and smiled a more than commonly knowing smile.

"I didn't say I knowed her; you are puttin' words inter my mouth."

"No; I merely asked a question. It is immaterial. We are the woman's friends. You say she owes you something. Let us have the account, and produce the trunk."

Like a flash of lightning the bland, suave manner had vanished.

In his own words, the inspector saw the woman needed sharp treatment. He had "sized her up."

"Good manners thrown away on her," he said afterward.

"And how do I know you have any right to that trunk?" she asked, snappishly.

"The woman sent us here. She has left the city, and I have an inventory of the things in her trunk."

"Oh, you didn't suppose I stole any of the woman's traps, did you?"

"Can't say till I compare the contents with the inventory."



"IS NOT THIS YOUR PICTURE?"—Chap. XXI.

Now, ma'am, I'll trouble you to look sharp. I'll come in, and, while your people bring down the trunk, I want straight answers to a few questions."

Mrs. Cummings looked prepared to fight, but the inspector did not wish to waste his time, so he said, sharply:

"To simplify matters, I'll tell you who I am."

He threw his card on the table in the hall and strode into the parlor, followed by Mr. Decker.

A change came over the woman's face. An humble, deprecating look took the place of the scornful sneer.

"I am sure I'm willin' enough to tell anything I know."

"All right."

The brisk, business-like officer drew a note-book from his pocket.

"Now, how long is it since Madge Warren came here with those twin children?"

"Five weeks—near six weeks ago."

She twisted the inspector's card nervously about in her fingers, and blinked uneasily.

"How did she account for having the children in her possession?"

"She said they was her nieces; her sister had died, and left them destitute."

"Indeed! Why, did you not suspect something was wrong when you read about the kidnapping of Mr. Decker's twins from his house in Newport?"

Mrs. Cummings gave a sort of gasp.

"Do you mean to say them little brats was the twins I read about in the paper?"

"I do."

"Gracious alive! And a reward was offered for them?"

"Yes, a reward of ten thousand dollars."

She sat down, and the red spots faded from her cheeks.

"Well, if my man won't give me the laugh when he hears this."

"I do not blame him if he thinks this a stupid piece of work."

"Land of liberty! Ten thousand dollars! Why, that would make me rich for life."

"You will take a long time to make it renting rooms."

"I should think so."

"Now tell us how she came to go off so suddenly."

"Oh, I see plain enough now. I let a room to a woman from Boston, and she was never done talking about them twins and the abduction."

"And you think Madge Warren took the alarm?"

"That's it. And me such a fool, I never tumbled."

"Well, how much does she owe you?"

"Three dollars."

"Bring down the trunk, and a signed receipt for the money, and I will pay it."

An ill-favored son, with a red face and a long neck, brought a small trunk down, and, assisted by the driver, placed it on the carriage.

He was a loafer in appearance, and would have allowed his mother to drag the trunk down herself, but he wished to be able to brag in the saloons where he passed his time that he had had the pleasure of an interview with the famous inspector that day.

He stared at the great man with red, bleared eyes and a vacant grin.

"That plan is a pattern nest for raising criminals," said the officer, as they drove away.

"Why, the old woman looked like an ignorant old drudge, but harmless enough."

"So she is, but it is because she is too cowardly to do anything bad, not from principle. She is the sort of woman who brings up a lot of lazy sons who are under no control, and invariably end in prison or on the gallows."

"Why did you carry off the trunk?" inquired Mr. Decker.

"Because I intended to examine it. In the trunk we may find some clew as to where the woman has taken the children."

"You are right. I should never have thought of that."

When they returned to Police Headquarters, the inspector gave orders that he should not be disturbed until he rang.

"Now for the trunk," he said, after bolting the door of the inner office.

He drew a large bundle of keys from a drawer in his writing-table, and soon had it open.

It was an ordinary traveling trunk with a tray on top. At one side there was a hat-box. When this was thrown open the first thing the inspector saw was a sort of silk case for photographs.

He drew out the contents.

Mr. Decker started.

"Why, there is a photograph of my children," he exclaimed.

"Is that so? Why, what object did the woman have in providing evidence against herself in this fashion?"

"She is mad!" murmured the unhappy father, as he gazed lovingly on the faces of his lost infants.

"See here!" cried the inspector, as he continued to examine the portraits. "Is not this your picture?"

Mr. Decker took it from his hand. It was his own photograph, taken in Eastbourne, England, twenty years before.

"It looks like me," he said, in some confusion.

"It looked like you twenty years ago."

Mr. Decker gave the officer a curious glance.

"I must have aged very much in the last few weeks," he said, quietly.

"You have, sir. I never saw a man change so in such a short time."

"I have been so terribly anxious."

"Yes, I understand that. I have little children of my own, and I must confess that, were I in your place, I should be a madman."

"Let us see what else the trunk contains."

Nothing but ordinary wearing apparel; nothing that afforded any clew to the whereabouts of Madge and the stolen babies.

"I should like to keep this photograph," said Mr. Decker.

"I am sorry," replied the officer, "but we can get copies of it. See, it was taken on Sixth avenue. It will be of immense value to me in my search for the children."

"True, I did not think of that. We have no portrait of them except a large oil painting."

"I'll send you some copies of this in a day or two."

"Well, inspector, I will not encroach upon your time any longer. I thank you for your prompt action."

"Not at all, Mr. Decker. I trust that we may soon have good results to show from the important clew you have given us. Good-day, sir."

Mr. Decker had the day before him. He did not wish to interfere with the detective's work, but he thought it would do no harm for him to see the artist who had taken the photograph of his children.

He ordered the coachman to drive to — Sixth avenue, and walked up three flights of stairs to the little gallery.

CHAPTER XXI.

HARASSED BY DOUBTS AND FEARS.

Sidney Van Stretten could not rest satisfied until he cleared up the doubts which haunted him and destroyed all his happiness.

"I shall follow Decker to New York, and meet him face to face."

With this object in view, he called at Bleak Point, to obtain from the housekeeper, Miss James, Mr. Decker's address.

He found the whole house in a state of confusion. Mr. Hammond had arrived from Chicago, and insisted on taking his daughter home immediately.

He was a big man, with a shrewd but kindly face. He stood in the center of the hall, giving directions about the packing of some valuables, when Sidney Van Stretten rang the bell.

"How do you do?" he asked, shaking hands cordially, though

he had never seen Sidney before. "Are you a doctor?" he added, interrogatively.

"No; I am merely an acquaintance of the family. I am going to New York, and called to obtain Mr. Decker's address."

"Is that so? Well, I don't know it. Perhaps Miss James does. Sit down, sir. I'm awfully busy. I came on here, and was simply horrified to find my daughter in such a sad condition."

"We all sympathize with Mrs. Decker."

"Of course—who would not, poor thing! I was surprised to find her husband absent."

"Mrs. Decker has, I understand, in her nervous state, taken an aversion to Mr. Decker. Of course that will all disappear when she recovers."

"I hope so," said Mr. Hammond, shaking his large head; "but I don't know whether there is any cause for it or not."

"I can assure you, so far as I know, that Mr. and Mrs. Decker were devoted to each other before this trouble came on them."

"That's what they all say, but you can never tell. Well, of course, in any case I'll side with my own child. That, sir, is human nature. I'd side with her, if I knew she was dead wrong."

"Yes, that is natural, as you say. But I have no doubt that your daughter, as she recovers, will acquit her husband of all blame."

"That's what they all say," repeated Mr. Hammond. "I hope so, I am sure."

Miss James now appeared and informed Mr. Van Stretten that Mr. Decker had been at the Hotel Brunswick when she heard from him last.

"It was only a telegram," said the housekeeper, "just to inquire for Mrs. Decker."

"Thank you," said Sidney, and he then bade Mr. Hammond good-by and left the house.

He was at a loss to decide what step to take next.

When Decker heard that Mr. Hammond was about to carry his wife away to Chicago, it was natural to suppose that he would return to Newport for an interview with his father-in-law, even if he did not accompany the party West.

"If I start now, I'll miss him, in all probability," said Sidney. "I shall wait a day or two. Once the house is closed up he will not return here."

Lillian was now released from her duty by the invalid, and Sidney would have been exceedingly happy if he could have driven away the black shadow of doubt.

He longed to know, for certain, whether it had ever occurred to Lillian, but dreaded to ask the question.

He wished very much for some one to whom he could confide his doubts, but there was no one. Mrs. Vandercliff, although she was kind-hearted and sensible, was an arrant gossip. His sister was out of the question, and Dr. Salter was, for many reasons, an unsuitable confidant.

That night, as Lillian and Sidney sat on a bench not far from the sea, he said, suddenly:

"Lillian, do you know that a horrible fear has taken possession of me?"

"Sidney, you alarm me!"

"She looked in his face tenderly, and slipped her hand in his."

"I wish you would laugh at me," he went on, "ridicule me, anything to make me feel that this doubt is absurd."

"How can I do so, Sidney, when I do not know what your doubts and fears are."

"I dread, I fear, Lilly, that the man who calls himself Decker is none other than my sister's husband, Clifford Derwent!"

"Oh, Sidney!"

"It is true, the man was pronounced dead, was buried. I was not at his funeral, but others were. Still, I cannot rid myself of the thought that he is alive."

Lillian's face had grown whiter than marble. She trembled, but her voice was calm as she quietly asked:

"Why should Mr. Derwent die, and still be living? I don't think I understand."

"Listen, Lillian. Before he died, he was ruined. He had spent my sister's fortune. His funeral was conducted in a peculiar way, and all the arrangements were made by this man, Gregory, who is now Mr. Decker's confidential servant."

There fell a breathless hush between them. Lillian broke the silence.

"Sidney," she said, "every particular you have mentioned was repeated at the time of my husband's death. What if Vivian was Clifford Derwent?"

"And now is Marshall Decker!"

"Surely it is impossible. How could the man rise from the grave?"

"I dread the thought. It drives me mad. Lillian, if this is true, I shall kill him with my own hand."

"But, Sidney, it cannot be true. If it is, there must be some way of discovering the truth."

"You are right. I never thought of that. I shall start for New York at once, and never rest until I see whether this man possesses the power of dying and rising from the dead."

"And masquerading in another shape. Oh, Sidney, what shall become of us if this is true?"

The full horror of the position came over her.

"If it is true! Don't speak of it, precious one. Let us at least hope till hope is dead."

She knew that hope was already dead, in spite of his brave words.

"Remember one thing, Sidney," she said. "I never really loved this man. At the time I thought I did a skillful glamour was thrown over me. Long, long before his death I knew I had never loved one who was so utterly unworthy of affection from any pure woman."

"I am glad to learn that, my heart's darling. But tell me, Lilly, the night you saw him first, when my sister fainted, did you feel no doubt? Were you not struck by the striking resemblance which they tell me is so great? I never saw Vivian, and I was not present at the reception when Louise was so overcome. Did you fear anything was wrong at that time?"

"Yes, Sidney," said Lillian, frankly, "I did, until your sister fainted and the words—I do not know who uttered them—were sounded in my ears, 'He is exactly like her husband, Clifford Derwent!' Then I felt reassured. If such a resemblance could occur once it might easily do so again. I reflected, if this man looks so like this Derwent, why should he not look like Vivian. Of course, the idea that they might be one and the same never occurred to me for one moment."

"Of course not. Have you seen him often since that night?"

"No, and now that you speak of it, I believe he avoids me. Of course all has been trouble and confusion ever since the loss of the children, and he dared not come near his wife, so I did not remark that he kept out of my way."

"You were doing so much for his wife. It would have only been natural for him to see you and thank you for your kindness to Mrs. Decker."

"It would."

"Well, Lillian, I will set out on my mission to-morrow. If Derwent's body lies in the vault at Trinity Cemetery I suppose I may rest satisfied."

"No, Sidney, I shall not feel satisfied till you visit the vault in the old grave-yard on Broad street, in Savannah. If Vivian's body rests there in our family vault, then all doubts will be set at rest forever."

"Then, Lillian, I shall start on my dismal tour of investigation to-morrow. Heaven grant that our doubts are but fancies, the children of our over-busy brains."

"I hope so; but, Sidney, suppose they are too well founded. What then?"

"Then, Lilly, as I said before, I shall feel it my duty to rid the earth of a monster."

"But, Sidney, I cannot allow you to endanger your precious life."



"Yes, you can, my brave Lillian. You, the daughter of an old Southern soldier, would not counsel me to leave this blot upon your name and mine?"

She bowed her head in silence. Her name was an old and honored name. She was the daughter of a race of soldiers. Family traditions are strong in their influence over such women as Lillian. Family honor dearer to them than life.

"Say nothing, dearest," Sidney whispered. "All is uncertainty now. Wait till we know more."

The rest of the evening was spent by the lovers in tender confidences too sacred for any heart save their own.

When the hour of parting drew near, Lillian wept, but Sidney comforted her. With new-born strength he whispered of hope—hope which he did not feel. The greater his own dark despondency the more he strove to cheer her.

They parted at length with a long clinging kiss in which there was bliss inseparable in spite of all that might happen ere they met again.

Lillian knew Sidney was firm in his resolve. He might be going to his death, but still her love for him overcame her anxiety for the future.

"My own noble Sidney," she whispered. "Be true to yourself and me."

Before he slept, Sidney had work to do. He wrote his will, leaving all he possessed in case of his death to Lillian. He called in two of Mrs. Vandercliff's servants to witness the signature and in their presence sealed up the document and addressed it to their master, who was absent on a yachting tour.

"Good-night, Rodgers," he said to the old butler, who was slightly mystified by these proceedings. "This is only a business matter between Mr. Vandercliff and myself. I am going away by the first train to-morrow, and I did not wish to trouble the ladies about it, but I wished to attend to it in case Mr. Vandercliff should return before I did, for otherwise he might think me negligent. You will please take care of this for your master, Rodgers, and this is for yourself." He handed the butler a handsome gratuity, and paid the same compliment to the other man.

"Now, good-night," he said, and retiring, endeavored to snatch a few hours' sleep.

Before Mrs. Vandercliff or any of her guests were up he was gone.

A last hasty note to Lillian informed her that his resolution was unshaken.

"I go, my darling," he said, "and if we never meet again, always remember I have loved you all my life."

Lillian had hard work to retain her composure. She had to act a part, for Sidney did not wish any one to know that his hasty journey was other than an unimportant business trip. So she had to endure Louise's tiresome questions, her silly surmises and frivolous conjectures.

It was very trying, but she stood it as long as possible. Then pleading a headache, she retired to her own room.

CHAPTER XXII.

DELIA O'BRIEN IN A NEW SITUATION

Doty firmly intended to inform the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children of the twins whom he had been forced to leave to the tender mercies of old Jabez and Madge Warren, but his design was not carried out, for this reason.

As he was crossing State street, near Madison, he was knocked down by a runaway horse and narrowly escaped being crushed by the cable car.

By seven o'clock in the evening on the day of his abrupt departure from the cottage, he was lying in a cot in the accident ward of the County Hospital.

"What's the matter with me?" he asked the nurse. Being a medical student, he recognized his surroundings.

"You were injured in the street to-day, and brought here in an unconscious condition. Your left leg is broken, and you must keep quiet."

He put his hand to his head which ached, and found it was bandaged.

"Was my head hurt too?"

"Yes, but it is nothing to worry over. Now you must keep quiet."

To settle all attempts at conversation the nurse walked away, and Doty was left in the uncertain light to gaze around at the big room full of small beds, each one of which held a sufferer like himself.

He felt dazed and ill, but he soon fell asleep.

One of his last waking thoughts was, "I'm glad I warned Delia. She will be on the watch."

A few days after, when his head felt clearer and he was better

acquainted with his nurse, he told her about the children, and expressed great anxiety on their account.

The nurse promised she would attend to the matter, without fail. Then she promptly forgot all about it; in fact her attention wandered while Doty talked, for she set the whole business down to his injured head.

"Strange what wild ideas they take into their heads," she said to herself, and thereupon dismissed the subject from her busy brain.

When Doty next alluded to the twins, she assured him that everything was "all right," and being at the best of times painfully shy, he never ventured to mention them again.

In the meantime Delia O'Brien had devoted a week to shopping and sewing before she considered her wardrobe in proper condition to do her justice in the home of a millionaire. Then she presented herself, and was at once engaged on the recommendation of Mrs. Styles.

Miss James received her, and gave instructions in a manner which proved to the quick-witted girl that no exhibitions of temper, or other erratic proceedings, would be tolerated for a moment.

"It's mighty different here from the old doctor's cottage," said Delia, as she descended to the servants' hall at luncheon time. "But I like it better; it is more loike the ould cuntry."

Delia was a smart girl, and, when she could not have too much of her own way, a good servant.

She soon became familiar with her work, and felt quite contented.

It was a noble mansion, and everything in the housekeeping line was conducted on a scale of luxury and magnificence never found in greater perfection than in the home of a self-made American millionaire.

"Shure, where is the lady of the house?" asked Delia, when she had been in the employ of Mrs. Decker for about three weeks.

"Mrs. Decker is ill," said the housekeeper.

"Is it her the woman wid the white cap waits on?"

"There are two ladies with white nurses' caps. They both attend Mrs. Decker."

"Well, now, an' what moight be the matter wid her?"

"She is ill with a spinal trouble."

"Oh, that's bad enough."

"Yes, unfortunately, it is very serious."

"Well, well," said Delia, looking all about her, for she was engaged under the housekeeper's superintendence in dusting the statuary and bric-a-brac in the long reception-rooms, which were separated by long gold-embroidered portieres. "Well, well, it is an iligant thing to be the lady over all this; but phats the good of it all whin ye don't get yer health?"

"You are right, Delia; health is the greatest blessing of all."

"That's what Father Rafferty used to be tellin' us in the ould cuntry. Health and pace of conscience, says his riverence, goes afore all else on earth."

"Poor Mrs. Decker has known terrible trouble."

"Well, thin, I'm sorry for her."

Delia had nothing to do with the sick lady, and, to tell the truth, did not bestow much thought upon her. She received good wages and had considerable time to herself.

She was a happy, lively girl, and had completely forgotten the cottage, the twins, and her promise to the cannibal.

One day she was called upon to dust and set in order a room she had never set foot in before.

"This is Mr. Decker's private room," said Miss James, "and he is expected home; so we must include it in our daily sweeping and dusting."

It was a spacious room, with windows that opened on the lawn. It was beautifully fitted up as a library.

The wealth of handsome books on the shelves impressed Delia, who always associated learning and study with the clergy, for whom she had a good old-world reverence.

The old oak wainscoting and deep purple plush hangings, and the rich stained-glass windows, also impressed her. Everything in the room was deep-tinted and somber, with here and there a gleam of gold to lighten the effect of so much ruby and russet tone.

Over the old oak mantel, which was black and shining as ebony, there hung a picture. It was sunk into the chimney and outlined with a bead of gold. Over it hung a dusky curtain suspended from an ebony rod by golden rings.

"Shure Mr. Decker must be a very holy man!" said Delia.

Miss James was busy re-arranging some books which had been displaced.

"Very holy, Delia!"

The tone of surprise nettled Delia.

"Well, if I wint to slape in this room I'd drame I war a

clergyman. How can he be tormented with all them books if he isn't a holy man?"

Miss James repressed a smile.

"He is a very studious man, if that is your meaning," she said.

"Studious; so that's another name for holy. Well, the longer ye live the more ye'll be after learning."

Delia dusted the curtain which hung before the picture, but did not draw it to one side. She fancied it was something sacred, taken in connection with the costly marble statues and the stained-glass windows. If Delia had enjoyed the advantages of a classical education she would have known that the statues on either side of the deep bow-window were Jupiter and Mars.

"Shure it's loike a church," said she, speaking in low, reverent tones to herself, for Miss James had been called away. "Arrah, what a queer hat that saint has on him!" she added, as she deftly dusted the god of war and carefully arranged the purple plush curtain at his back.

If Delia had only raised the curtain which overhung the painting, she could not have failed to recognize the twin children she had seen in old Lohn's cottage.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TIGHTENING THE COIL.

After procuring the necessary permit, Sidney Van Stretten engaged assistance to open the coffin which was supposed to contain the remains of his brother-in-law, Clifford Derwent.

He drove out to the cemetery in a carriage. He had a friend with him—one of his old college chums and classmates. Rufus King was now a practicing physician, and a busy man, but he made time to accompany his friend on this mission.

Of course Sidney had confided to Doctor King his reason for visiting the cemetery. The doctor had laughed at him, but, seeing he was thoroughly in earnest, had willingly consented to assist him in his gruesome task.

It was a dark, dismal day, when even the weather seemed in keeping with the mysterious and melancholy visit to the resting-place of the dead.

The two gentlemen were somewhat silent during the long drive. The doctor was a jolly fellow, generally in the highest spirits, but he did not like his errand on this occasion, and Sidney felt greatly depressed.

"I know what the result of our examination will be," he said, gloomily.

"So do I. The poor fellow's bones will be found where they ought to be, intact."

Sidney shook his head.

"You will see," he said, sadly.

The coachman and his companion on the box were more cheerful.

"What are these gents going to do at the grave-yard?" asked the driver. It was an ordinary hired carriage; for Sidney did not wish to excite comment among his servants by employing their aid on this occasion.

"Can't say; look if there is room in their fam'bly vault for a few more of the aristocracy. I s'pose."

"Why, is any of them dead?"

"No; but there's one rich old maid 'spected to drop off any minute."

"Well, rich folks is curious. Now, I don't like them vaults. I'd sooner be put under ground, and done with it. However, every one to his taste."

When the cemetery was reached, Sidney stepped out of the carriage first, and seemed anxious to get over the ghastly business without delay.

When the coffin was opened, it was found to be full.

"I told you so," said the doctor, in a tone of relief.

"Examine the contents of the casket," Sidney said to the man who had just raised the lid.

He obeyed. A large piece of black cloth was turned back, and beneath it there was a quantity of sand.

No body, no bones!

"Great Heaven! the body has been removed!"

Van Stretten staggered away, and would have fallen, if his friend had not caught him by the arm.

"You are perfectly certain there is no mistake?" asked the doctor, in a hollow tone.

"None whatever. Look at the coffin—a purple velvet casket, and an outer one of bronze. His name on the plate. Let us go. It is no use waiting here. I found just what I expected."

The return drive was not so melancholy as the other had been.

Now that his worst fears had been realized, Sidney faced the matter bravely.

"My next journey of the same nature will be to Savannah, Georgia, and I anticipate no other result," he said, calmly.

"Let me offer you one consolation, Sid," said Doctor King.

"What is it?"

"This. If Vivian is Derwent, he was a married man when he married Mrs. Armstead. Therefore, she is free to marry whom she pleases."

"See here, King, do you suppose for one moment that I am going to make this business public?"

"Well, I don't see how you can avoid it very well."

"You think I shall drag my name, my sister's name, and that of Lillian Armstead through the mire?"

"See here, old man, it is no use to out up rusty with an old friend like me. What are you to do? You can't let your sister marry Salter, who is an honorable man, though I call him a fashionable quack, if her scoundrel of a first husband is still alive. Of course Mrs. Armstead is free, if Vivian is the same fellow—which, by the way, you are by no means certain of, if you have never seen him."

Sidney waited till the doctor finished his somewhat heated remarks.

"Look at me," he then said, slowly; "do I look like a man who would tamely submit to have the two women he loves best on earth victimized by a villain, and not avenge their wrongs?"

"No, by thunder, you don't! But, Sid, be reasonable about it. You say you won't expose the fellow; well, how can you get square without doing so?"

"I can challenge him, and see whether his Elixir of Life is proof against lead or steel."

"Nonsense, man; duels are out of date, and were so in your grandfather's time."

"Yes, but I think it was a mistake to allow them to fall into disuse."

Dr. King knew Sidney Van Stretten too well to argue with him in his present mood.

He bade him good-day, and they parted at the entrance of the Hotel Brunswick.

At the clerk's desk an inquiry for Mr. Decker brought out the fact that that gentleman had left New York for the West the previous day.

"Well, I may as well continue my investigations," Sidney said to himself, and he started for Savannah that night.

The first person he interviewed was Mr. George Tatnall.

The two men had often met, but were by no means intimate friends.

"I have called upon you, Mr. Tatnall," said Sidney, "for two reasons. One is a pleasant one, which, if you like, you shall have first."

Mr. Tatnall looked surprised, and a little grave.

"It is always a pleasure to see you, Mr. Van Stretten," he said, candidly. "My sister often mentions you in her letters."

"Then you know my pleasant news already, I presume. You are aware of my engagement to your sister?"

The Southerner's face cleared.

"I do, and congratulate you. Lillian is as fine a woman as ever breathed."

Yes. Now for the unpleasant portion of my story. Are you at leisure to listen to rather a long story?"

"Certainly. Consider me at your disposal for the present."

Van Stretten related his experience with his sister's husband; he told of his examination of the diary and record of the life elixir. He then came to the history of the extraordinary resemblance between Derwent, Vivian, and Decker; of all three having the same faithful valet in their employ; of his almost positive certainty that Decker and Derwent were one and the same, and of his own and Lillian's doubts and suspicions.

"Now, Mr. Tatnall," he said, "I am prepared to have you think me a madman for a short time. I trust I can, however, before I go further, that I have examined Clifford Derwent's coffin, and found it contained nothing but sand."

"Great heavens!"

"It is a fact. I have also brought the diary and a portion of the other documents with me. Though this man possesses the infernal art of changing his age as a snake casts its skin, some little habits of his individuality may cling to him—his handwriting, for instance."

"You are right. First of all, though, we must overhaul that coffin in the old cemetery."

"With, I greatly fear, the same result as followed my examination of our vault in New York."

"I hope not. Good heavens! I hope not."

Very little time was lost in the investigation.

The coffin was empty!

"Now," said Sidney, calmly, "the next thing to be done is to find out where this man went when he left the grave-yard. After his trance he must have been weak and ill."

"He is a devil! Perhaps he can jump out of his casket and dance a jig over his own grave."

"Scarcely, I think," Sidney said, with a feeble smile.

"Well, Savannah is a good-sized city but it is not New York; so I guess we will be able to track him, to whatever den he hid in."

"I think so. See, in the first place, what became of Gregory Hamlin after the funeral?"

"He was about the city for a time. I met him in the street more than once."

"We must find out where the man was and there will be little trouble required to locate the master."

About ten days were consumed in the search, then the retreat at Spotswood was discovered.

Old "Carmel," and African Ed were still in possession; Laf had died six months before.

When the investigating party arrived, the old woman, who was more intelligent than her husband, received them.

She was seated on the same bench where Jabez Lohn sat on the day he first saw Vivian.

"Good-day, auntie," said Tatnall, "I want to have a little talk with you about your master."

"Ain't heard nuffin 'tall 'bout him lately," said Carmel, looking rather uneasy.

"He owns this property, does he not?"

"Yes, massa. I hope you ain't gwine to turn us outin' de place. Tain't wuth notin'; white folks can't live in it nohow. De ruff all done tumble in."

"Don't be frightened, auntie, we are not going to turn you out," said the Southerner, kindly. He sat down on the bench and signed to Sidney to follow his example.

"We are only going to ask you a few questions about the sick gentleman who visited your master before he went North."

"Dat sick man, I ain't got no use for he. He war de 'casion ob ole massa gwan away."

"Is that the case?"

"Yes, 'tis. Ole massa was settled down here. Many de time he tole me he meantter like and die here long side of me and Ed."

"And this sick man persuaded him to leave, eh?"

"Yes; ole massa done picked up so—got so young 'gain, guess he did'n feel like dyin' no mo'."

"Your old massa's health improved after he had the other man come to stay with him, then?"

"So it did. Why, ole massa looked ten years younger. Nebber see bech a change in nobody."

Mr. Tatnall and Sidney exchanged glances full of meaning. The former had read a portion of the record of the effects of the elixir, and recognized the writing as Vivian's. He possessed some samples of Vivian's chirography and they seemed identical with that of the record.

The glance which passed between the two men said, "So he revealed the secret of the elixir to this man Lohn."

"Well, what other things took place which made you disapprove of this stranger?"

The old woman shuffled to and fro in the dust with her bare feet.

"I did'n like de 'doption ob dem cullid chillun."

"The adoption of colored children?" repeated Mr. Tatnall, in astonishment.

"Yes; de folks dey still keeps on a comin' here to 'quire 'bout dem. I don't know nuffin 'bout dem."

Again a meaning glance passed between the gentlemen. This time it was a glance of horror.

In each brain the same ghastly thought sprang into life.

"Come, auntie, I am stupid to-day, and I do not understand about this adopting of the children. Please explain it to me."

The woman hesitated.

"I'll tell you all I know 'bout it," she said, as if she had made up her mind at last. "Ole massa he said he wanted to 'dopt some chillun, and de folks dat had more chillun dan dey knowed what to do with dey was glad, 'cause folks said ole massa was pow'ful rich. Well, dey 'dopted four likely little chillun."

"Well, what of that? Did they not treat the children kindly?"

"I dunno, massa. I'se monstrous uncertain in my mi."

"'bout dem chillun."

"Surely you saw how they treated them if you lived here."

"No, did'n. Nebber seen de chillun no mo' after dey 'dopted dem."

"Why, how was that?"

"De chillun ain't been here no mo'."

"Why, where were they?"

"Ole massa, an' de oder man, dey sey de sent de chillun Norf."

"Well, wasn't that all right?"

"I dunno; 'spect it am all right, only de chillun p'ants, dey

ask 'bout dem chillun and no buddy eber dun seen chillun on no boat nor no train eder."

"Oh, they may have gone fast enough."

"Maybe so, only I dunno. I'se oneasy 'bout them chillun. Fack I is."

Mr. Tatnall was silent. He surmised what the fate of the children had been.

The question was, did the old woman know more than she revealed.

"Have you heard from your master since he left?"

"No, massa."

"Did he say he would write?"

"He tole me he war coming back in six weeks."

"What do you suppose detains him?"

"I tink dat oder man done make 'way with ole massa."

"The stranger?"

"Yes, dat man had dat candy-colored ha'r, an' I nebber like people wid candy-colored ha'r."

"His hair was blonde?"

"Yes, jis like de beard ob de co'n."

"How long was it after the stranger came before your master went North?"

"'Bout five, six weeks."

"How did they amuse themselves during the stranger's visit?"

"Reading books, an' mixin' all kins ob messes in de tiny little glasses. Nebber see sich mussin since I was born."

"And they sent the children North, and you did not see them again?"

"Dey said so."

"It seems to me, auntie, that you have some doubt about it."

"I does'n want to get massa inter no kin' ob trouble."

"Of course not. Suppose you tell me all you know, and I'll find out if the children are well and happy in the North. I must find out, too, if your master is alive and well. It seems strange that he should tell you he was going to return, and never do so."

The old woman shuffled her feet about in the dust. She looked distressed and uncertain how to act.

"Come, auntie, I guess you know who I am, and I would like to know what you think about those children."

"I knows you, massa."

"Well, let us have your story."

The old woman was sorely tried between anxiety to relate a startling story and her fear of injuring her master. Finally she said, "If any one done it, it was dat candy-ha'r'd man."

"I have no doubt of it. I dare say he has murdered your master and stolen all his money as well."

"Dar now! Dats what I done tell Af'can Ed, my old man. I know all dem candy-ha'r'd people is bad and trec'rous, terrible trec'rous."

"Well, auntie, what about the children?"

Sidney's patience had about given out. Tatnall, however, thoroughly understood the negro character. He knew how to extract information, in spite of reluctance on the part of his informant.

"Well, massa, you know my boy Laf-a-yette what die las' fall?"

"Certainly. I knew him well. Fine smart boy he was."

Tatnall heard of Lafayette for the first time that moment and put his foot in it when he extolled his smartness. Carmel's suspicions were rather aroused.

"Mus' be some oder Laf-a-yette dat you know'd if he was smart. My boy was mos' a fool."

"When I said smart, auntie, I only meant he was a good willing boy. Very anxious to do right, and I always make it a rule to speak well of the dead."

Carmel felt that a reproof was conveyed by these words.

The compliment to her dead son also pleased the mother's heart.

"You is right, massa; I ain't doin' right to call de pore dead boy a fool. Hows'ever, I'll tell my story, for de sun am mos' ready to sot. Well, on 'count of Laf not being so smart as mos' folks he was foreber lazin', list'n, and pokin' 'roun' oder folkses' biz'ness. Dat nster make me an' old Ed mad'n lujuns. So dat boy want on; 'pears like we could'n break him ob dat trick no how. One day he cum to me and say:

"'Mudder, what mak' dat cryin' noise in de ole lof'?"

"Course I k'rect de boy. I tell him:

"'Go long, ye fool."

"Did'n pay no 'tention."

"Well, he nebber tell me no mo' till ole mars and de candy-ha'r man gone Norf. Den one day I cotched him wid he pa's spade. I say:

"'What ye doin' wid dat spade?"

"An' he pull somet'in' out ob he pocket an' show me, an' I dare to you, white folks, I mos' die on de spot."

"What did de boy show you?"

"It was de bones ob a little han'!"

"What?"

"Fack, massa! I say to Laf:

"For de sake ob de Lawd, where yon get dat?"

"Den dat boy took me down in de cellar an' tole me he uster h'ar de ole massa diggin' on moonlight nights—you know dat boy nebber could sleep moonlight nights; and Laf he 'lowed dat massa was buryin' he gold. So Laf he done wait till ole massa an' dat candy-ha'r man go Norf; den dat boy Laf he go down inter dat cellar an' dig. What'd dat boy dig up but dat little han'; and if dat han' don' b'long to one ob de little 'dopted chillun, who it b'long to? Dat's what I like to know."

"You are sure it was a human hand?"

"Sure, ob co'se I'se sure. Don' ye s'pose I'se seen plenty ob han's dat de plow tun up in de cotton patch since de wah?"

"Ob, on old battle grounds."

"Yes, on ole battle groun' since de wah. Well, dat little han' was complete. I was dat strack when de boy done show me w'ar he foun' it, dat I mos' fell on de groun'."

"Where is it now?"

"Why, I made dat boy Laf put it right back whar he got it. Down in dat cellar; but I'se mos' 'fraid dat's whar all dem 'dopted chillun is, 'stead ob been sent Norf."

"No doubt you are right, auntie. Have you mentioned this to any one?"

"No, massa; I'se 'fraid to sleep in de house 'count of dem little ghosteses—dem pore little 'dopted spurits. So de ole man an' me we jes bunk down to de same ole place we uster sleep in while ole massa was here."

"Very wise of you, auntie. Now tell me who the people are that the little adopted children belonged to. I'll see if I can't catch this candy-haired man, for I suspect he has killed your old master as well as the children."

"Fore de Lawd, I dun b'liebe you is plum right, massa!"

"I fear so. Now, Carmel, tell me who are the parents of these four children."

"Well, massa, de fust one was ole Hick'ry Jim; he hab dat many chillun dat de pore old critter mos' go crazy when he wife die."

"Hickory Jim—where shall I find him?"

"Jes 'fore you come to de bridge at de tu'n ob de road goin' inter Savannah."

"Who next?"

"Hick'ry he fader ob de twins ole massa 'dopted; dey was a boy an' a gal—de boy name 'Lonzo, de gal she name 'Tilda. Parson he pick out de names."

"Well, where did the other ones come from?"

"De udder chillun dis yer way: De boy he 'long to Yaller Clowtil—she uster 'long to ole Mars Henderson, fore de war; de boy he 'long to dat gal 'Melie, what's laundress to de Piv'lion House."

Tatnall made rapid notes of these names.

"Now, auntie, you must keep a quiet tongue in your head," he said. "If not, you will prevent me from accomplishing anything."

"Bless your heart! I ain't goin' to say a word. De Lawd knows for all, I'se seared to open my mouth."

"That's right. Good-day. Here is something to buy tea with. Come on, Sid."

He passed his hand through Van Stretten's arm, and left Carmel gazing at the gold piece he had slipped into her hand.

"Now," he said, emphatically, "I have Mr. Vivian where I want him."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CLEW AT LAST.

Mr. Decker arrived in Chicago the day after Delia had arranged his library. He looked wretchedly ill, and had aged very perceptibly since the last time Mr. Hammond had seen him.

That gentleman received him, and started in amazement when he beheld his son-in-law.

"Why, good heavens, Decker, you look as old as I do!" he said.

"I dare say," rejoined Mr. Decker, carelessly. "I feel several thousand years old. About the same age as Ptolemy the last."

Mr. Hammond looked very grave; he did not like this flippancy at such a time.

"How is Clara?" inquired Mr. Decker.

"She is much calmer now, like yourself, since her return."

"I fear not. The doctors expressly forbid any excitement. I am sorry."

"It does not matter," said Mr. Decker.

His father-in-law stared at him with stern disapproval.

He did not understand how thoroughly reckless the wretched man had become.

"Well, I must go out. What are you going to do?" Mr. Hammond said, shortly.

"I shall go to Police Headquarters. I spend most of my time now in them. I hastened here because some astute detective has discovered, by accident I presume, that the woman whom they now say stole the children came here."

"Indeed! Do you think you can rely on this information?"

"No, I guess not. You cannot rely on anything they say. The only clew that amounts to anything was the one Gregory furnished."

"Where is Gregory?"

"He is playing amateur detective."

Decker did not wish Mr. Hammond to know that Gregory had left his service. He was moving heaven and earth to find the man and induce him to return.

He walked slowly into his library and shut the door. He then drew aside the curtain which protected the picture of his children, and stood with his eyes fixed on the innocent faces of his twin daughters.

"Gone!" he exclaimed, in accents of despair. "How ingenuous is my punishment! The only time in my life that I have tried to do right, the first pure love that has stirred my heart has been turned into the cruellest anguish a man could suffer! 'Let a man turn from his wickedness,' says the prayer-book. No, let him live consistently, I say. If he turns from his wickedness his old sins will spring up on every side to drag him down, eager as blood-hounds on his trail. I turned from my wickedness. I loved those pure little darlings!"

He cast himself upon the floor and moaned aloud in uncontrollable anguish.

An hour later he left the house. He had traveled all night, but he did not wait to rest. He had eaten nothing since noon of the day before, but he did not wait for breakfast or luncheon.

"That poor man will die!" Miss James said, compassionately, as she saw him rush from the house.

"Shure is that the master?" asked Delia, who was busy over her morning dusting.

"Yes."

"I thought somebody said he was a young man."

"He is, but he looks so ill, so unhappy."

"Faith he looks as ould as Mr. Hammond himself."

"He is terribly changed. He was the handsomest man I ever saw when he was married to Miss Hammond four years ago."

"Well, he ain't very handsome now; he is pale and doubled up, and all that's young about him is the yellow hair."

"Poor man, he is greatly to be pitied. Come, Delia, let us dust the library now, while Mr. Decker is out. He spends a great deal of his time there, and must not be disturbed. Never go into that room while he is in the house."

"No, ma'am. Shure, the family is queer. The lady I never laid me eyes on, and the gentleman looks distracted. What ails them at all, at all?"

"Is it possible that you don't know?" cried Miss James, in astonishment.

"No, ma'am. Mrs. Styles, she said something about them being in trouble, but they don't wear mournin'."

"Then you did not hear that their little children were stolen out of their beds while the family was at Newport?"

"No; shure, I did hear the butler say something about Mr. Decker's daughters being abducted, but I didn't know what he meant, and shure I'm a modest gurl, an' I didn't loike to ask."

"Well, the babies—they are twins, and they are only two years old—they were stolen out of their nursery."

"Saints preserve us!"

This ejaculation was forced from Delia's lips by the sight of the painting, which Mr. Decker had left uncovered.

The moment Delia followed the housekeeper into the room she caught sight of it, and just as soon as she did so she recognized the children.

"Why, Delia, what is the matter?" asked Miss James, for the girl was standing staring at the picture with her mouth wide open.

"Who is thim?" she gasped.

"That is a portrait of the stolen children."

"What?"

"That is a picture of the twins which were stolen from the house at Newport."

"Do ye mane it?"

"Of course I mean it. What do you mean by acting like

Miss James spoke sharply, and brought Delia to her senses. "What do I mean? I mean that this is the very twins I seen in old Morrison's cottage in Hyde Park."

"You saw them. When?"

"A couple of weeks ago. When I was living with Collan be-
yant."

"Well, Delia, I cannot help thinking you are wrong, but there is a large fortune waiting for you if you can tell where those children are."

"Well, I can tell where they were when I left Hyde Park."

"Dear me! what a pity so much time has been lost. You did not see this picture before?"

"No, ma'am; I dusted that curtain, but I did not pull it back, for I thought it was part of the master's religion to keep it covered up."

"It is only covered to preserve it."

Miss James did not know how to act. She longed for Mr. Hammond or Mr. Decker to return, so that she could inform them of Delia's discovery.

Mr. Decker was the first to enter the house, and Miss James met him at the door and eagerly imparted the information.

"Call the girl!"

He sat down in his library, pale and trembling.

Delia appeared.

"You are certain the children you saw are the same as the ones in that picture?"

"Yes, sir, the self-same."

"You do not know how many times people have thought they recognized the children. Tell me where you saw them, and who had charge of them."

"I was living with an old doctor, and his name was Morrison. One day a woman came to the door, and she was black as a gipsy. The doctor had a long talk with her, and the next day he told me he had engaged another house-keeper, and he brought her home with the two little children."

"I am afraid you are mistaken," said Decker, "but put on your hat, and we will go to the place and see the children."

While Decker went to dress, Miss James came in.

"Mr. Decker," she said, "I wish to give you something which Mrs. Gordon handed me before she left Newport."

She placed the silver match-box in his hand.

He started.

"Where did Mrs. Gordon get this?"

"On the floor in the nursery on the night the children were stolen."

"It only confirms what Gregory discovered," he said to himself. "I do not understand why it was not produced before," he added.

"I believe Mrs. Gordon showed it to the detectives, and they said it had probably been lost by some of the parties who rushed into the nursery when the children were missed."

"I dare say they were right."

He dropped the match-box in his pocket and said no more.

Delia now appeared, and they hurried away in the carriage after the girl had given the coachman the address.

Mr. Decker was silent during the drive. He now recognized that Madge had been in the room on the night of the abduction, for the match-box was one he himself had presented to her father, Thomas X. Herne, the gipsy horse-dealer.

When they reached the cottage Delia sprang from the carriage and rang the bell.

There was no reply.

"Shure I believe the house is empty."

Mr. Decker walked around the cottage. Every window was fast shut, every shade drawn down.

"I'll go to the landlord and find out what this means," said Delia, and she hastened away.

She soon returned, running and breathless. "Come and talk to Collan, sir," she gasped, and the carriage was driven to the landlord's door.

Mr. Collan was willing to give all the information in his power.

He said the old gentleman, Doctor Morrison, had called and given up the keys of the house.

"The rent is paid up to the end of the year," said Collan.

"He told me when he first took the house that he liked to pay by the year, English fashion, and I had no objection."

"What about the furniture?"

"Well," said Collan, "he told me he might return, but if he did not that I would hear from him."

"But the woman—the children?"

"I don't know anything about them. One of the children died about a week ago."

"What!"

"One of the little ones died."

"What doctor attended it? How long was

"The old doctor attended it himself. It was not ill long; it died of croup." Collan was only in time, quickly as he stretched out his arms to catch the wretched man as he sank upon the floor.

"It was his child," cried Delia, who stood by speechless until now. "They were kidnappers, the murdering crowd! Shure didn't I tell ye they'd murder them childer."

The nearest doctor was hastily called, and Mr. Decker was taken home and placed in bed.

He was utterly prostrated.

Mr. Hammond had been informed of the sad news. He at once lodged information with the police, and a warrant was issued for the arrest of Jabez Lohm and Madge Warren, for abduction and murder.

The body of little Meta was exhumed, and the cause of her death investigated. The doctors decided that death had resulted from suffocation.

The physicians added that the child was reduced and worn as if by long illness.

While detectives, spurred to fresh energy by the promise of a magnificent reward, scoured the country for Jabez Lohm and Madge Warren, Marshall Decker lay on what appeared to be his death-bed.

There was no longer any doubt as to the identity of the children. Little Meta was easily recognized by all who had known her in life.

An advertisement for the luckless Doty was inserted in the papers, and at length a reply written by one of the hospital nurses was received.

Mr. Hammond visited the hospital and found Doty, who wept when he learned the fate of the little one he had tried to befriend.

"I'll never forgive that Delia," he said, "she promised me so faithfully; I wish she was a man, I'd thrash the life out of her as soon as I was able."

"I wish you were well enough to help us now," said Mr. Hammond.

"Oh, I wish I was. Oh, for Heaven's sake don't rest, sir; save that other poor little thing if you can. The one I loved the best is the one they murdered."

He buried his face in the bed-clothes and gave way to his grief. Mr. Hammond wiped his eyes. He laid his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Keep up your heart, we may catch them yet," he said, hoarsely.

Every one in the hospital was informed that Doty had powerful friends. As soon as he was able to be moved Mr. Hammond came himself and took him to the stately home which held so many sorrowful hearts.

"Now, get well," said the railway magnate. "When all this trouble is over I intend to send you to college. You shall study medicine in Paris, or London, or Edinburgh, or all three."

"Thank you, sir, but can't I first help find that infernal old villain and that cursed fiend of a woman?"

"They have been found," said Mr. Hammond, solemnly.

"Where, sir?"

"You heard of the flood that washed away an entire town?"

"Yes, I heard them talk about it in the hospital."

"Well, the bodies of the old man, the woman Madge, and the little child Sibyl, were among those recovered from the wreck of a railway carriage."

"Great Heaven! Then both children are gone?"

"Yes, both. They will sleep together, my two poor little grandchildren. Beautiful in life, in death they will not be divided."

"I am sorry I did not have a chance to avenge them."

"Yes, it does seem hard."

"How does your daughter bear her loss?"

"She knows nothing of it. For the time Heaven has darkened her mind."

"That is a mercy."

"It is. I thank Heaven for it."

"But the father of the children?" Mr. Hammond's face darkened.

"I prefer to leave the subject of Mr. Decker's conduct without comment," said the old gentleman, with dignity.

Later Doty learned the reason of his reticence.

CHAPTER XXV.

DISHONOR AVENGED.

Lillian Armstead had, of course, been informed of every discovery made by her lover.

She was not surprised by the result of the examination of the vault in Savannah. The previous one in New York had prepared

Mr. Hammond was, of course, kept in the dark.

but her brother wrote a peremptory request, which was in fact command, that her wedding must be postponed.

"Well, I am sure!" she said, angrily. "What does Sidney mean? He goes off on a wild-goose chase for Heaven only knows what, and everything and every one has to stand back for him."

She stamped her foot while tears of vexation filled her large brown eyes.

"I think you can trust your brother, Louise," Lillian said, gravely, "he would not ask you to put your wedding off unless he had some good reason."

"Oh, fiddlesticks! you would find an excuse for Sidney if he committed a murder."

Lillian shivered.

"Don't say such horrible things, dear," she pleaded.

She felt nervous and ill. How little this trifling butterfly of fashion knew what serious, what terrible things occupied her brother's time. She felt tempted to tell her the truth and shock her into some depth of feeling.

She looked at the flushed face, so child-like in its pouting annoyance and petty vexation.

"No, I shall spare her," she said, her better nature prevailing over the momentary anger.

Anxiously Lillian awaited the next tidings. Her heart ached in sympathy with Sidney.

"How good, how true, and noble he is!" she said. "If I had only known that he loved me when first we met, how happy we both would have been all these wasted years!"

* * * * *

Sidney and George Tatnall soon convinced themselves of the fact that a monstrous crime had been committed in the lonely ruin of Spotswood.

The bones of the four little negroes were discovered in the cellar.

Of course nothing could be gained by making the atrocious murders public.

The families of the children never learned the ghastly truth, but Sidney Van Stretten tried by every means in his power to atone to them for the loss of their children.

Old Carmel and African Ed are also better off than they ever were before in their lives.

The old ruin is deserted, and, as time rolls on, will probably be seized for the payment of accumulated taxes.

Needless to say, the owner of the property was never seen nor heard of again.

When Sidney Van Stretten turned his back on the South, his investigations were at an end.

All that now remained to be done was the settling up with Marshall Decker.

Mr. Tatnall was a Southerner, and he was at first determined to avenge the family honor, but Sidney persuaded him to leave this task in his hands.

"You have a wife and family," he said, "while I am single, and have no ties or responsibilities. My will is made. Lillian will be my heiress. My sister is engaged to a wealthy man, who is devoted to her. So my mind is free from care on her account."

"But it is my place to avenge the injury done to my sister."

"My claim is prior to yours. My sister has also been this villain's victim."

"That is true. Well, Sidney, I suppose I must relinquish the task to you."

They parted with this understanding.

Sidney had no difficulty in tracing Marshall Decker. He had cast aside all scruples, and was once more plunged in a career of shameless dissipation.

He was in New York, spending money recklessly, and living a dissolute life, which disgusted every one who had known him as a prudent man of business and respectable member of society.

Sidney did not wish to visit him alone, so he requested Rufus King to accompany him to the hotel, where Decker was living in luxury.

"Is Mr. Decker at home?" he asked, as he knocked at the door of Decker's suite of rooms.

"Yes; but I do not know whether he is at liberty or not," replied the servant who had replaced Gregory.

"Inquire, and hand him this card."

Sidney stepped into the reception-room, followed by Dr. King.

From an inner room came the sounds of gay voices and laughter, mingled with the clinking of glasses and knives and forks.

"Mr. Decker is at breakfast," the servant said, returning.

"Indeed! Then we will wait."

They sat down and waited, while the meal proceeded, los-

ing nothing in mirth on account of the presence of the uninvited guests.

Toasts were drunk and jests spoken which were far from decorous, though, from the sound of the voices, it was evident that women were present.

The doctor elevated his eyebrows, and Sidney said, quietly: "I wonder if he knows I have come for war, and wishes to offer a gratuitous insult."

After a time the conversation flagged, and the breakfast party broke up, with many jests, and half-engagements to meet again.

Cigars and cigarettes had been lighted, and some of the guests were somewhat noisy before they left, which they did by another door than the one Sidney and his friend had passed through.

Steps were heard approaching, the portiere was thrust aside, and Decker walked into the room.

His face was flushed, and his hands were thrust into his pockets.

He stared offensively in Sidney's face, and said:

"Well, Mr. Van Stretten, to what fortunate circumstance do I owe this unexpected honor?"

"To no fortunate circumstances, Clifford Derwent, or Algeron Vivian."

Decker scarcely looked surprised. He laughed rudely.

"So you have been imposed on by that lying blackguard of a servant of mine who was discharged for his insolence?"

"I have seen no servant of yours."

"Then why do you come here to insult me with your fabrications?"

"Because I have visited the two tombs which were supposed to contain your remains."

Decker started. He grew pale and bit his lip.

"I do not know what you are talking about," he blustered.

"I have also assisted Mr. George Tatnall in removing the remains of your victims, the murdered children, from the cellar in Spotswood to a grave-yard."

He sat down suddenly, as if his legs had given way under him.

"You must be mad!"

His eyes stared horribly. The veins in his forehead stood out, and he seemed about to go into a fit.

"I have no warrant for your arrest in my pocket," said Sidney, quietly, "though I can easily procure one. I shall not make this abominable matter public if you agree to my conditions. We can settle it privately."

"Let us hear them."

"We shall select a place where we can meet quietly. My friend, Doctor King, will accompany me. You can bring any one you think you can depend upon. Our meeting must be final. You understand?"

"To the death?"

Sidney bowed.

"I represent the wounded honor of two families," he resumed.

"My friend, Mr. Tatnall, has placed the matter in my hands. As you are the challenged party the choice of weapons rest with you."

"Small swords."

"Very well. Now, have you any choice as to the place of meeting?"

"None."

"The party who does not leave the ground shall be supposed to have committed suicide?"

"I agree."

Doctor King spoke for the first time.

"A suitable spot can easily be found on the Palisades, and we can be secure from interruption if we chose an early hour. It is light now at half-past five. Will to-morrow morning suit?"

"Certainly."

"I know a spot just about six miles above Fort Lee. We will be on the ground, which is in every way suitable, at half-past five to-morrow. You will be there with your friend?"

"Rely upon me."

Sidney and the doctor bowed and withdrew.

Two days later the dead body of Mr. Decker was found on the grass in a lonely part of the banks of the Hudson.

The spot was partly hidden from observation by some fir trees, and was situated just seven miles above Fort Lee. He was stabbed through the heart by a small sword which he still retained in his right hand.

The deceased gentleman had been greatly grieved by his misfortunes.

His beautiful twin daughters had been alienated, and one of them had become insane on account of the loss of her father.

These sad events had preyed on Mr. Decker's mind, and his conduct for some time had been so singular as to attract much comment.



The inquest held on the remains resulted in a verdict of suicide while laboring under the influence of temporary insanity. "Decker did not know when he selected small swords that Sidney had studied at a German university," said Doctor Rufus King.

Gregory Hamlin never appeared in the presence of any one who had ever known him. He retired to the West Indies where he lived and died among strangers.

Lillian and Louise Derwent were married on the same day. The latter never knew how significant the fact was.

Mrs. Decker, after several years of harmless insanity, recovered her reason under the skillful treatment of Doctor Doty, her father's adopted son, whom she loves like a brother. No one knows the story of Clifford Derwent's infamous life, save Lillian and her husband. Not even to her most intimate friend, Grace Hunter, has Lillian ever confided her story.

"It is best that we should never speak of it," said Sidney, on the day after the marriage. "Let us bury it in oblivion and try to forget it."

[THE END.]

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